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THRYTHO.

THRYTHO

A DRAMA

BY

E. HAMILTON MOORE

Author of "Undine," and "Rienzi and Ygraine"

SHERRATT & HUGHES
London and Manchester
1904

TO

MY FRIENDS

CHARLES AND EVELYN LORD

THIS VOLUME

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

173528

Môd Þrŷðo wæg,
fremu folces cwên, firen ondrysne;
nânig þæt dorste dêor genêþan
swâsra gesîða, nefne sîn frêa,
þæt hire an dæges êagum starede;
ac him wæl-bende weotode tealde
hand-gewriþene; hraþe seoþðan wæs
æfter mund-gripe mêce geþinged,
þæt hit scêaden-mâl scŷran moste,
cwealm-bealu cŷðan. Ne bið swylc cwênlic þêaw
idese tô efnanne, þêah ðe hîo ânlicu sŷ,
þætte freoðu-webbe feôres onsæce
æfter lige-torne leôfne mannan.

[Bêowulf.

Hwǽr cwôm mearg, hwǽr cwôm mago? hwǽr cwôm
mâþþumgyfa?
Hwǽr cwôm symbla gesetu? hwǽr sindon seledrêamas?
Êalâ beorht bûne! Êalâ byrnwiga!
Êalâ þêodnes þrymm! hû sêo þrâg gewât,
Genâp under nihthelm, swâ hêo nô wǽre!
[Eardstapa.

Thrytho bore pride, cruel malice, the dangerous folk-queen. Neither was any found of loved companions bold enough to look upon her, nor might another than her wedded lord gaze with too curious eyes by day upon her beauty.

For she imposed the death-bond. She fashioned with her hand for such the fetter. Then after the binding was the sword appointed; the blade that sharply shears, the deadly weapon making known the death-woe.

No woman's deed is this though she be beautiful! That for fierce anger or pretended insult she should seek, she being called Peaceweaver, to do a friend to death.

[*Trans.*

Where is the horseman? Where is the rider?
Where is gone the Giver of Treasure?
Places of feasting, friends and pleasures?
Alas for wine bowl sparkling! Alas for burnied warrior!
Woe for pride of princes! Lo! how Time departeth,
Shrouded in the night shades as she had been never!

[*Trans.*

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

OFFA ... ... King of Mercia

HROTHGAR ... ... Brother-in-Law of Offa

EGFRITH ... ... Offa's Son

ÆTHELBERT ... King of Anglia (disguised as a Scop)

ÆLFRIC ... ... An Earl

ALCUIN ... ... A Prelate

BYRHTNOTH ... ... A Young Earl

A CLERK

THRYTHO ... ... A Worshipper of Woden

ELFRIDA ... Daughter of Offa and betrothed to [Æthelbert

HROSFRITH ... ... Elfrida's Attendant

THE THREE NORNS.

Earls—Warriors—Ambassadors of Charlemagne—
Attendants on Elfrida and Thrytho.

PROLOGUE.

THRYTHO.

PROLOGUE.

A towering mass of cloud, grey, lowering, illuminated from time to time by the lurid light of storm. Far below, a rugged coast line, dimly discerned, the sea breaking white against the cliffs.

In the cloud three gigantic figures, themselves cloudy and indistinct, the NORNS *who weave the web of human destiny, seated at their immemorial task, and looking earthward.*

THE NORNS *(chanting together).*

Strife of the Princes,
Cryings of battle,
Weeping of women
And changing of Empire:
The life of Man upon mould we are weaving,
The thread of the Gods is between our fingers.

THE PAST. Thor have I crowned and Woden, over men
To rule; and they have swayed, yea, and shall sway.
Out of the mists I called them, long ago,

Further than thought may reach: look, look and see
The Thunderer's splendour light the Æonian gloom!
And this, this is the pattern of my weaving.

THE PRESENT *(who is blindfold).*
Strife, strife and change, and God-dethroning years
That have forgot the old and guess the new
Blindly, nor know the new till it be old!
So short a space is mine, that, as I speak,
Lo! it is thine, sister of hoary eld.
I weave, I weave, and know not what I weave.

THE FUTURE. Thor trembles, Woden wails upon the wind,
Lo! Freya is forgotten as a dream.
New names are on my lips, and in my web
The pattern of thy ever-changing thread
Spells out its perfect meaning, as I weave
The life of men unborn, and Gods to be.

THE PAST. The Gods can never change.

THE PRESENT. Lo! they are changing!
E'en now I am alone, I feel them pass.

THE FUTURE. Lo! they are changed, are fled, I know them not.

THE PAST. The Gods are mine. For ever shall they stand,
Uncognisant of change which touches not
The feet of the All-Father.

THE PRESENT. Like a wave
That saps the lichened rock, lo! in Valhalla
Time creeps on him who sits above the Gods,
Touches, and lo! he is not any more;
His date is overpast.

THE PAST. Oh, let the thread
A little longer linger on the wheel.

THE PRESENT. It may not be, I haste I know not whither.

THE FUTURE. It may not be, I see the end afar.

THE PAST. Dreams are upon me; long forgotten years;
Time's first-born nurslings cry to me again;
So many memories I have forgot!
Yet, yet, revoke the strong decree, my sisters,
And for a certain span, even while thrice
The Wheel might turn, sit by, and let us mark.
For fear is on my heart. . . . Shall we too pass
With the old Gods? . . . .
. . . . Behold. I see HER stand

Beside the flood and cry on Thor and Woden!
'Tis I have lit her eyes, and breathed on her
My immemorial passion. In her heart
Pulses my blood; her spirit calls me Mother.

THE FUTURE. Me would she make as thee! it may not be.

THE PRESENT. Look where KING OFFA in a western isle,
Holds royal state, forgetful of the Gods
His fathers knelt to. Surely he is mine,
And worships the new light that from the East
Outshines Valhalla. To his court her feet
Are bent who is thy child. There would she make
Time Present and To Be as one with thee.
Blood, blood is in her path, and in her heart
A fire . . . .

THE FUTURE. And there is ONE, her chosen victim,
A King and crowned—and yet he is my son!
Throned—and yet all men's brother! As a bard
He sings of the new days, the song I taught,
The song that yet shall be. She hearkens him
And even for the dirge the Past has sung
Into her ears, her soul is inly stirred
To that dire deed . . . .

THE PAST. Say, what shall she achieve?

THE PRESENT. 'Tis hidden from mine eyes what yet shall be.

THE PAST. Speak, speak. Oh, speak . . . .

THE FUTURE. The years to come write of her . . . .

THE PRESENT. My wheel is humming. Tell me, oh my sister,
To what end is my labouring?

THE FUTURE. More swift
Turn thou thy wheel, yet may not I unriddle
Thy meaning to thee, nor resolve thy doubts.
The end is set in sight, I may not speak it.
Swift and yet swifter weave, oh, sisters mine,
With twilight coloured threads shot thro' with dawn,
The mystic pattern of the years to be.

They chant together.
Strife of Princes,
Crying to battle,
Change of watch-words
Falling of standards;
The life of Man upon earth we are weaving,
The years of the Gods are ours to number.

The clouds roll over the scene, and louder and ever louder the moan of the waves and the rattle of shingle down a rocky shore shuts out the sound of their unearthly singing.

ACT I.

Act I.

SCENE I.

A desolate coast. The night dark and stormy. THRYTHO *enters.*

THRYTHO. Far driven by storms across the angry sea,
I welcome these wild rocks, this lonely shore,
And bless the Gods whose still-protecting care
Has led me safely to this English land.
Loud sings the wind to the tempestuous ocean,
Hums in my ear . . . .
[*Thunder and lightning.*
O Thunor! hurl thy bolt across the dark!
O Woden! who hast led my wandering bark,
O hear! Hear my devotion!
To thee I kneel, O Freya! I implore,
Goddess, thy aid.
By vows and offerings duly paid,
By the strong right hand of Thor,
By the might of the All-Father,
By the Christ, whose shameful Cross
Is His triumph, is your loss,
By the dread decree of Wierd,
Gods! dethroned, yet still revered,
Ah, direct, where'er I go,
Footsteps exiled by the foe
Of the faith which I profess,
Now, alone!

Grant me for the past, redress;
Ah, make known
The God-like power below. [*Thunder.*
Thor hears me! Woden hears! In fearful thunder
And ever-rising storm they make reply.
Now, while the tempest rages, safely, I
Will wait from here the breaking of the dawn.
[*Scene closes.*

Act I.

SCENE II.

THE MEAD HALL IN KING OFFA'S PALACE.

Enter in state OFFA, EGFRITH, ALCUIN, HROTHGAR, THE AMBASSADORS OF CHARLEMAGNE.

OFFA. This treaty sealed of late with Charlemagne
Confers new honour on our settled State.
That State bought dearly! Bought with sword and spear,
And blood of warriors spilt on Otford's field,
Where proud Lothaire renounced the realm of Kent.
Hard strife at Bensington, where Kenwulf's crown,
And the broad lands of Wessex from his grasp
Passed into ours. Long war against the Welsh,
Our fiercest foemen. Now from Dee to Wye
Extends the long line of our sheltering Dyke,
Powys repulsed, and Pengwern's towers our own.
Last, treaties with the Eastern Anglian States,
Made for the marriage of our well-loved child
With Æthelbert, a warrior young and bold,
And friendly bonds knit 'twixt us and the Franks.
Nor have we failed at home to cultivate
The arts and industries that spring from peace,
The growing Church, the faith but late received,
Taught by her learned doctors, chief of whom

Our Prelate, Alcuin, will we send with you,
According to your Monarch's pious wish,
To crush the spawn of new sprung heresy.
With him, Egfrith, our son, to bear from us
Tokens of kingly friendship. And for you
We have prepared a gift; for every man
Three horses never broken to the rein,
With harness well adorned, a coat of mail,
A shield, helm, sword and banneret of gold.
Enjoy these gifts and think on Mercia well.

AMBASSADOR. A better entertainment never king
Bestowed on friendly envoys from our Court.
Offa, thy state and liberality
Equals and passes the report men hold
Of thee and of thy greatness. We go hence
To spread abroad thy fame in distant lands.

HROTHGAR. Say, will this treaty hold? The King seems pleased.

EGFRITH. 'Tis but his heat of fancy—quickly stirred,
You know his manner. Who is't enters there?

HROTHGAR. A wandering singer! Let us hearken him.

[ÆTHELBERT OF ANGLIA, *disguised as a wandering singer enters the doorway, and stands among the warriors.*

A WARRIOR. Stand there! What is thine errand? What thy name?
What would'st thou in these halls?

ÆTHELBERT. A wandering Scop,
Egbert my name; mine errand, to thy King;
For, charged with embassy of high import,
Hither from Anglia's monarch am I come.

WARRIOR. Come, pass friend, pass; see where King Offa sits.

EGFRITH. Stay, singer, ere thou pass, and if thou be
What this thy garb, and thy sweet harp proclaim,
Some song I pray thee.

WARRIORS. Hark! A song, a song!
[*All gather about the Scop.*

ÆTHELBERT *(sings).*

From forest hidden home the singer strays,
Widely he wanders, loved in every land.
In many mead halls has his song been heard,
Oft times his boat has left the well-known strand,
And, spreading out white pinions like a bird,
Has cleft with narrow keel the waste sea-ways.

Who hath not loved the singer and the song?
Who hath not poured for welcome guest the mead?
His halls are empty, desolate their walls,
The horseman, and the spear, the doughty deed
Sleep in a common silence, none recalls
The former fame, nor shall his name live long.

Greet well the singer: break the twisted ring,
Hearken the tales of heroes who are slain.
The banner droops, the sword edge crumbles brown,
The burnie gleams not in the light again.
The fire drake guards their treasure on the down,
They ever live in song: greet them who sing!

WARRIORS. Well sing'st thou, Scop!

EGFRITH. A goodly song! Drink, stranger, from this horn.
Myself will lead thee to the Mercian King.
Leader of Warriors, lo! a messenger
From Anglia's monarch, newly entered here.

OFFA. Let all withdraw. What would'st thou speak with me?

ÆTHELBERT. No secret message, Offa, do I bear.
A Scop am I, nourished in Anglia's Palace,
Beloved of him, the sharer of his heart.
Now hither hath he sent me, still to be
A willing messenger 'twixt him and thee,
Tarrying at thy service in this Court.
Further, he sends this regal ornament
Beyond all price to give unto the King;
And for the lady Elfrida, this gem,
Set in a ring of gold, to grace her hand.

OFFA. Egbert, be welcome hither for thy lord,
And even for thine own sake. Egfrith, to thee
This stranger be committed. Guard him well,
And bring him to thy sister, Elfrida.

[EGFRITH *and* ÆTHELBERT *withdraw.* OFFA *rises, and prepares to take leave of the* AMBASSADORS.

EGFRITH. Come hither, Scop. Methinks I know that face,
That voice, that lay, known but to me—and one!
Art thou not he? What means this singer's weed,
This lowly raiment? Wherefore art thou come?

ÆTHELBERT. Hardly we blind the loving eyes of friends!
Hither I come in secret to behold
Thy sister's beauty and, unknown to her,
Become her friend, her servant, dearer grown,
Ere yet I take her from her father's house.

EGFRITH. A loving thought! But tell me, was this all?
You'd learn my father's state, his wealth, his power,
His faithfulness to friends . . . .

ÆTHELBERT. You're bitter tongued!

EGFRITH. Come, no denial, do I blame?
'Twere well.
Trust not too far! A ruler and a king,
A warrior and a guardian of the Church,
Some sparks of proud ambition he retains,
And oft his speculations thither turn,
To the fair fields of Anglia—'twere a prize
To be desired, and but for Elfrida
(A bond knits thee more closely to his heart),
I know not . . . . but I pray, e'en for my love
Watch thyself well. Commit not to his faith
The Anglian King unguarded, but preserve
Secret thy person, and this slight disguise
Strengthen with feignéd tales, and singers' lays.

ÆTHELBERT. I purposed, Egfrith, to observe
the same.
Be thou but secret; for upon the harp
Thou knowest me not unskilful, and my lays
May win perchance the ear of Elfrida,
Her heart for Anglia.

EGFRITH. Or for Anglia's Scop!
See to it that thou play not with her love.
She deems it surely knit to Æthelbert,
And 'twere a cruel deed to shake her peace.

ÆTHELBERT. Speak lower—see the King is
parted hence.

[*Exeunt* OFFA *and Attendants.*

I would not cause her loving heart one pang,
I saw a maiden, regal, fair of face,
In queenly raiment clad and white of hand.
With gentle countenance she looked on me
As if she half divined a debt of love.
If this be she . . . Alas, what grieves my friend?

EGFRITH. Myself away—Elfrida ignorant.
It likes me not; tarry not here too long.

ÆTHELBERT. Come, thou art ever timorous—
all is well.
I have a thousand reasons to thine ear
To be imparted and I know not fear.

[*Exeunt both.*

Act I.

SCENE III.

BEFORE THE PALACE.

Preparations for the departure of EGFRITH *and* ALCUIN *for* CHARLEMAGNE'S *Court. Enter* HROTHGAR *and* EGFRITH.

HROTHGAR. The parting hour is come. Egfrith, what cloud
Involves thy brow in gloom? Despondent? How?
Would I went in thy stead to feast mine eyes,
To glad my heart with splendour of the south:
The Court of Charlemagne, the valour, wealth,
Beauty and power, the gorgeous state he keeps,
All that has made him famous through the world!
Fair Frankish women, clad in richest robes!
Dark eyes, soft glances! Christ! I weary here
Of petty wars and pallid Mercian maids.

EGFRITH. Your blood is hot, mine keeps more even pace
Though younger. Would you went indeed for me.

HROTHGAR. Your heart is faint!

EGFRITH. In truth, when have I cared
For womens' beauty or for courtly pomp?

HROTHGAR. This is of old thy speech, but well I know
'Tis no indifference wraps thy brow in black.

Some trouble throws its shadow o'er thy mind
And darkens all things. Lay it off, I pray,
Impart it to my friendship, if at all
My counsel may avail.

EGFRITH. 'Tis naught, 'tis naught!
My fears are false; forebodings of an ill
That has no being, phantoms of my brain.
Yet, ere we part I'll make one earnest prayer,
Would grace thee in the granting.

HROTHGAR. Speak, mine ear
Is ever ready, as my heart and hand,
With gladness, Egfrith, wait thy slightest wish.

EGFRITH. Hrothgar, I pray thee, in my absence guard
With friendship, for my sake, the Anglian Scop,
Look to Elfrida, and if aught of ill
Threaten or him or her, act thou for me,
Yea, spare not thy right hand, should harm approach.

HROTHGAR. The Scop? Why, Offa holds him half a son—
Already loves him, keeps him in his sight
As one he would not part with.

EGFRITH. 'Tis his wont—
You know his manner, and perchance my fears

Are all unfounded, yet I will recall
No word of warning. Guard him for my sake,
And think what shame it were should ill befall
An alien and a stranger by our hearth.

HROTHGAR. I marvel at thy care and think I see
Some secret reason thou wilt not impart,
Some trouble hidden from me in thy breast—
I press thee not to tell it. To my love
Thou hast committed such a charge as seems
To thee most precious—be it so to me!
Think thou art here to guard thy friend from ill,
So will I act for thee.

EGFRITH. And win my thanks!
I cannot speak them. Time shall tell thee all
And prove my asking not extravagant.
They bid my presence. Hrothgar, then we part.
Farewell, and lock my speech within thy breast.

HROTHGAR. Farewell! I look to greet thy glad return. [*Exeunt.*

ACT II.

Act II.

SCENE I.

A Forest Glade.

Enter Offa *and the Scop,* Æthelbert.

Offa. Here rest. This wooded glade invites
delay,
And I am weary. List, upon the breeze
Far off is borne the sound of huntsmen's horns
And baying of the dogs. The furious boar
Makes his last stand, and threatens with his tusks
His hot pursuers—stand or fall for me!
I care not for the chase. . . .

Æthelbert. No common care,
O King, weighs on thy heart, that leads thee here
To rest in idleness, when 'tis thy wont
More oft to guide the charge and hurl the spear.

Offa. Short was my sleep, and troublous were
my dreams;
And when I woke a fear still haunted me
Of evil hardly 'scaped, or nigh at hand.
Dark dawned the day to bring again the date
When my fair queen was snatched from me by
death.
Methought I saw her! Oh! it wrung my soul!

ÆTHELBERT. Shake off thy care and think she is at rest.
Cannot the hunt, the crying of the hounds,
The fierceness of the foe, who, with sharp tusks,
Tears up the earth, unroots the tender trees,
Stir thee to action?

OFFA. I am dull of mood—
Heavy, and wert not thou here by my side,
Well nigh could weep. Indeed, I marvel much
That Æthelbert thy lord, even for a space,
So lightly parted with thee—thou hast slipped
So quickly, dearest youth, into my love.

ÆTHELBERT. And yet within short time must I return,
Bear him report of Mercia's noble state,
Most kingly hospitality, and say
How fairer than his thought is she he loves.

OFFA. And so thou partest hence?

[*A pause.* KING OFFA *appears lost in thought.*

ÆTHELBERT. Come, let me charm away that careful cloud. [*Sings.*

O jocund time of spring! Now the hard chains,
Which all the winter bound the frozen flood,
Are loosened, and the pleasant hours draw nigh.
The sun, the heavenly torch, glides o'er the earth,

The jewel of the sky, his radiant beams.
Now sings the cuckoo in the solemn wood,
A melancholy note for him who far
Must wander o'er the bosom of the sea,
Traverse the whale path in his bird-like boat. . . .

[*Breaks off suddenly.*

OFFA. Pause not! Sing of the breaking northern floes
And coming of the Viking, and of war,
When the long line of yellow linden wood
Wavers in doubtful ranks. . . .

ÆTHELBERT. Again! Again!
Hearken, most sweet and strange—dost thou not hear?

OFFA. The wind among the trees, that thrills thy harp
With broken murmuring of melody.

ÆTHELBERT. O, list! How wild these notes. . . .

[THRYTHO *is heard singing without.*

THRYTHO. In Asgard, happy are the Gods!
The friends of men look down and see
The earth with flower and fruitful tree
Richly adorned.

Then laughs the Thunderer aloud,
The earth with golden light is glad;
He frowns, his brow with care is clad,
The heavens are covered with a cloud;
The rocks are cleft to make him mirth,
His lightnings blight the parched earth.

Then Freya in her magic car
Rides forth in state.
Earth knows her coming from afar,
The fruitful field to consecrate,
The harvest and the golden ears
That crown the never dying years.

Hail Woden, Father, once again
Wæs hæl, wæs hæl!
O Freya, Thunor, hear the strain,
Wæs hæl, wæs hæl!

[*Enter* THRYTHO.

ÆTHELBERT. Who comes with such a herald as this song?
Of stature more than female—see she starts—
And timid, turns to flight. Be not afraid!

OFFA. O youngest daughter of the Gods, delay!
Strange are thine accents, stranger thy fair face,
And this wild note stirs doubtful memories.
Nay, lady, rise, this needs not.

THRYTHO. Let me kneel,
King, as thy royal state seems to proclaim,
And looks of mercy! Guide my wandering steps!
Beyond the forest's utmost verge my home
I left two days ago, and in these wilds
Lonely have strayed. . . .

OFFA. Ah! tale of piteous ruth!
How hast thou 'scaped the dangers of the place?
Sustained the thirst, the hunger and fatigue,
The dread of darkness and the prowling wolf?
What power hath led thee hither, and what cause
Drove thee, thus helpless, forth, to tread these paths?

THRYTHO. Ask not the cause, but, if thou art the King,
Lead me to safety, that within thy walls
I may in quiet rest; nor seek to know
Aught more than this, that I am Thrytho called,
And crave the King's protection in my need.

OFFA. Yea, I am King, and able to protect.
Come whither I shall guide thee without fear.
Nor will I question more concerning thee
Than this thou hast confided.

[*Horn blows without.*

ÆTHELBERT. Hark the horn!
The hunters come, and hither bear their spoil.

THRYTHO. Now for this timely succour in my need,
First unto Ye who sit above the poles
Ruling this middle earth, be laud eternal!
Next unto thee, O King! after those Powers
With whom is all the shaping of our ways,
From the full garner of the times to be,
Fate yield such recompense as crave my prayers.

[*Enter the* HUNTSMEN *with* HROTHGAR *and the* KING'S *followers, carrying a boar, and leading their horses and hounds.*

OFFA. Lady, heaven hear thy prayers. Mark where they come,
Whose sword and shield shall guard thee from all foes.

HUNTSMAN. Wil't please the King to look upon the spoil?
These tusks yet stained with gore . . . .

OFFA. A goodly prize!
Of this anon. My Earls, my Thanes, behold
A suppliant for protection. Greet her all.

HROTHGAR. Lady, be welcome.

THRYTHO. May all good reward
This bounty.

OFFA. Hasten, bring a palfrey here;
Our guest is weary and we stay too long.

THRYTHO. Weary no more.

OFFA. Set on! Set on with speed!

[*Exeunt all save* HROTHGAR *and the Scop, whom* HROTHGAR *restrains from following the rest. As they pause they hear* THRYTHO *singing in the distance.*

THRYTHO.

O Wierd! the thread is weaving,
O Wierd! on thy loom!
Who may escape thee, O Wierd?
Who may escape his doom?
On thee at heart believing,
Loudly I call:
O speed the work, and at the shrine
Of every God my gifts shall shine.
Dread Power, before thee low I fall,
Hear me, O Wierd!

HROTHGAR. What is this song?

ÆTHELBERT. I know not.

HROTHGAR. She is fair.

ÆTHELBERT. Why dost thou stay me? Let us after. Come!

HROTHGAR. Sawest thou a fairer, Scop?

ÆTHELBERT. Yea, I have seen.

HROTHGAR. What seeks she here, I say, what seeks she here?
And Offa, didst thou heed?

ÆTHELBERT. I noted not.

HROTHGAR. Hark now! all's still. Why do we tarry longer?
Our absence will breed comment. Let us on.

NOTE.—*There were in Northern mythology three Norns, corresponding to the three Fates of Classic mythology. Of these three, Wierd was the Norn of the future. Compare the phrase "the three Wierd Sisters" and the German verb Werden.*

Act II.

SCENE II.

A Room in Offa's Palace.

Elfrida *and her Maidens seated at their spinning and embroidery.*

Song.

My lover, when the cuckoo cried,
Set sail across the sea.
Wide waves and ocean streams divide
My love from me.

When the changeful tide is fast
Bound in winter's chain,
When summer's leaf and flower are past,
He will come again.

Elfrida. Maidens, enough, put by the wheel, put by
The woven garments, leave us here awhile.

[*They leave* Elfrida *and* Hrosfrith.

Hrosfrith. Lady, your marriage day speeds on apace,
And all things must be ready ere it come.
Methinks you droop of late, as careless grown.

Elfrida. Why, here is store enough, and now methinks
The day is not yet fixed, it still may be
The Anglian King has scarcely read his heart.

HROSFRITH. His vows are with King Offa's interchanged,
And both have sworn that you shall be his bride.
Should he his vow forsake, your father's power
The insult would revenge, and Anglia,
Like Kent and Wessex, add to Mercia.

ELFRIDA. Alack! no fray for me, I pray the Christ!
Come, let us call the Scop and bid him tell
The pomp of Anglia and his kingly state.
Bethink thee well, how I must part from hence—
Part from my father, from my childhood's home,
And with a stranger go into strange lands.
Where is the Scop?

HROSFRITH. He went at dawning forth
With Offa, with the King, to hunt the boar.
They will not yet return. Why dost thou sigh?
I heard, though know not if the tale be true,
This Scop is of the royal blood, allied
To the Anglian King. A brother, whisper some,
Born out of wedlock, featured somewhat like.

ELFRIDA. These tales must not pass current with my maids.
A trusty confidant, but not akin
To Anglia's blood we may suppose the Scop.
Born better than a thrall well may he be,
Courteous he seems, goodly—but no more words,
Thou nor myself have seen my future lord.

HROSFRITH. Greater the pity; most men speak
him fair
And valorous, but caring nought for love,
Or women's beauty.

ELFRIDA. Hush! no more, I pray.
On whom my father has bestowed my hand,
To him I give it, not without dismay
From ignorance sprung, yet with a steadfast trust
That this alliance binds two friendly states,
And so shall I be called a Peaceweaver.
I hear the horses' hoofs this side the wall,
And a strange voice is mingled with mens' speech.
See if my father be returned. The chase,
If all went well, had scarce so early closed.

[*Exit* HROSFRITH. ELFRIDA *leans back in her seat with downcast eyes and a sudden look of weariness.*

Why do I sigh? Indeed, I droop of late,
And care for nought. She said too true, too true!
What ails me at this marriage nigh at hand?
Why do I shrink? A little week ago,
With unchanged cheek and mind of settled calm,
I looked to greet my lord. Ah me, what care,
What trouble darks my mood? Look, Elfrida,
Look in thy heart—alas, I fear to look.
No, no, it cannot be, no other love . . . .
What other love could shake my promised faith?
And yet I'd rather live and die a maid

Than wed this Anglia, though I know my heart
Is not averse to wedlock. I could love!
Oh, I could love! . . . .
If this fond tale were true, if he *were* like . . . .
I dream! . . . If he *were* like, could I not win
A little love from the cold warrior King? . . .
What if this *were* the King? . . . Folly! Alas!

[*Enter* ÆTHELBERT.

ÆTHELBERT. Hail, Elfrida! I met thy maid but now,
Who bade me to thy presence speed with haste.
(*Aside*) Sorrow be far from her! Why spring these tears?

ELFRIDA. Come hither. Is the hunt already closed?
I had a question . . . . I forget it now . . . .
Somewhat I meant to ask thee of the chase . . .
But put that by . . . . Since first to Mercia
Thy coming, say, how many days have sped?

ÆTHELBERT. Seven days, dear lady, have since then passed by.

ELFRIDA. Seven days! A week! And yet I never send
To ask thee of my lord, to bid thee take
A gift for that he sent! How lax I grow!

Come hither, pray. I never saw my lord,
And men say thou art not unlike to him.
How stands he, Scop, by thee?

ÆTHELBERT. About my height.

ELFRIDA. And featured like thee? Dark or fair?

ÆTHELBERT. 'Tis said
No brothers more alike, but this indeed
Is past the truth. This singer's robe for me,
For him the helm and sword and linden wood.
When thus equipped, a mail-clad warrior,
The likeness fades.

ELFRIDA. He is all warrior then?

ÆTHELBERT. Not all a warrior. Music and the sound
Of the glad harp find welcome at his court.
Himself will touch the glee-wood, loves to sing
Of mortal battles past . . . .

ELFRIDA. Men speak him hard.

ÆTHELBERT. Not hard, but love had never crossed his path,
And so he seemed untender, half averse
To women's company until his Æthelings
Urged him, yet young, to seek a royal bride.
Then wakened love, then when he saw thee first.

ELFRIDA. When saw he me?

ÆTHELBERT. Perhaps in dreams. At least he
knew thee fair . . . .
I cannot tell . . . .

ELFRIDA. In truth we never met.
He loves me then? His mind is still the same?

ÆTHELBERT. Lady, it never wavered.

ELFRIDA. Take this ring.
Bear it on thy return to my liege lord
In token of obedient constancy.
And ere thou goest I would speak with thee . . . .
Some word I may remember. Say, how soon
Is thy departure hence?

ÆTHELBERT. Within three days.
Another month will bring the King himself
With all his retinue to Hereford.

ELFRIDA. It is enough. [*Exit Scop.*

Now pent up heaviness
Break, break in tears from my o'erflooded eyes.
Another month, alas! No, no escape!
Our lives are on the shuttle, and the Fates
Heed not our impotent crying, but weave on
With mourning coloured threads! My heart's so
weary,

To hope's a toil o'er great! My heart's so sick,
Yet will not be untwined from its dear poison.
My world's grown all awry, unclear and darkling:
Now God have pity, who hast made me woman,
For we must suffer, all!

[*She bows her head on her hands. A sound recalls her. In the doorway stands* THRYTHO, *looking intently upon her.* ELFRIDA *starts, rises with a gesture of vague uneasiness and the scene closes.*

Act II.

SCENE III.

THE MEAD HALL.

The KING, THRYTHO, HROTHGAR, ÆTHELBERT, ÆLFRIC *and other Earls, Warriors, etc.* ELFRIDA *dispenses mead to the Warriors. The* KING'S SCOP *stands before the* KING *and sings to his harp.*

SONG *of the* KING'S SCOP.

I tell the coming of the mighty Ing!
To us the All-Father sent him as an aid,
When misery long time we had endured.
On the wide wave was tossed the boat with wings,
On the whale path it rode with twisted prow,
The ship that bore within its bosom Ing.

I tell the coming of the peaceful Ing!
A babe he lay among the golden corn,
And arts of husbandry he first made known.
Snatched from the barren harvest of the wave,
He taught to turn the sod and set the seed,
And first he touched the harp with sounding string.

I tell the coming of the warlike Ing!
The shield, the linden wood was by him laid,
The polished burnie glittered at the prow,

In his weak hand he grasped a mighty spear,
Who should hereafter teach the art of war,
And be his people's warrior and their King.

I tell the passing of the god-like Ing!
Far borne into the bosom of the deep,
With treasure piled the deck, and, o'er the dead,
Set high a blazoned banner gleaming far.
Wæs hæl, giver of bread and of the spear,
Who to the gods again art gathered, Ing!

OFFA. Thus 'tis our wont, lady, to entertain
Our welcomed guest with feasting and the sound
Of the glad harp. Go, Elfrida, and bear
To every warrior seated at the board
This horn of mead. Receive this ring of gold,
Scop, for thy song. Lady, again, wæs hæl!

THRYTHO. I thank the King. Wæs hæl! Well sings thy Scop,
And welcome to my ears this song of Ing.

OFFA. Of days gone by his song, and Gods forgot.
Better befits this hour for other speech
(How sweet this cup), of beauty, and fair looks,
And the soft light of radiant eyes, whose beam
Melts and intoxicates . . . . Turn not away!

[*They talk.*

HROTHGAR. Did not the King do well to leave the chase?
Is she not wondrous fair? What sayest, Ælfric?

ÆLFRIC. O Hrothgar, I am old. Mine eyes are dim
To woman's beauty. . . .

HROTHGAR. Dost thou ever murmur?

ÆLFRIC. Nay, but my faded memory holds in place
A lady of the Mercians (peace be on her),
And strange meseems this revelry to-night.

HROTHGAR. One day to grief. How should to-day remember—
Life being so short—the tears of yesterday?

AN EARL. Yet say, whence comes this woman?

2ND EARL. Nay, who telleth?

3RD EARL. None knows her comings. Hearken! [*Whispers.*

1ST EARL. Heaven forfend!

2ND EARL. If this should fall, should good blade longer lie?

[*They whisper among themselves and* HROTHGAR *leaves them.*

OFFA *(rising)*. A pledge! A pledge! The mead cup.

ELFRIDA *(handing him a gold-tipped horn)*. Lo! my Father,
The horn of heroes.

OFFA. Hearken, Earls and Warriors,
'Tis Offa drinks the fairest, Mercia's guest.
Drink also ye, and let your mirth be loud.

EARLS AND WARRIORS. Hail Offa! Thrytho, hail!

HROTHGAR *(to ÆTHELBERT)*. What dost thou whisper, Anglian, to thy harp?
Doth not thy heart leap up to look on her?
Methinks the King but coldly entertains
This lovely stranger; will he let her pass,
Or doth he purpose more than would appear?

ÆTHELBERT. How can I tell? It was but yestermorn
He found her in the woods.

HROTHGAR. Come, all men know,
Altho' but newly entered in the Court,
The King to thee unlocks his bosom's hoard,
And tells thee all his mind.

ÆTHELBERT. Not so in truth.
It is a noble custom in an earl
To keep his breast-thoughts locked, secret from all,
And I am but a tarrier in the Court.

HROTHGAR. Mark, his cheek flames! Methinks she looks but cold,
And yet her looks seem to invite his eyes
To gaze their fill—sawest thou a fairer?

ÆTHELBERT. Yea.

HROTHGAR. What? Elfrida? As ice to noon-day sun,
Simple and chaste and mutely good, but she!

ÆTHELBERT. Temper thine admiration, lest the King
Indeed intend her for his bride.

HROTHGAR *(starting)*. His bride?

ÆTHELBERT. Saidst thou not?

HROTHGAR *(mocking)*. *Bride?* Hearken, they call thee, Scop. [*They part.*

OFFA. Come hither, gentle Scop. Say, canst thou sing
The praise of women?

ÆTHELBERT. Yea, a goodly theme.

OFFA. Ho! ye who revel at the board, attend!
And thou, to win this ornament of gold,
Sing her here fairest.

ÆTHELBERT. Even her I sing.

SONG.

I heard men speak a lovely maiden's praise,
I saw her face at even, when the fray,
The spear play ceased, and warriors passed to rest.
Nought cared I for the beauty of a maid;
More straight, I sang, the ash-shaft, iron-tipped,
More yellow than her locks the linden wood,
More bright the polished burnie than her brows.

Again they brought a damsel to my door.
White were her breasts and black her tresses waved.
Whiter, said I, the salt foam of the sea,
Blacker the raven hovering o'er the slain,
And redder than her lips the blood of foes.

Now will I take my horse and ride far hence,
Ride by the shore, lest stranger land his ships,
And I will see what God will send to me!

I saw the daughter of a Mercian King.
More yellow were her locks than linden wood,
More brightly beamed her eyes than burnished steel,
Whiter her breasts than foam on the waste wave.

The King hath laid aside the hard-tipped spear:
Crooked art thou, said he, I knew it not.
The King hath done his polished burnie off:
Too faint thy lustre to reflect her face.
The King hath kissed her thrice upon the lips:
Sweeter her kisses than the clash of swords.

[*There is a murmur of applause, which dies away as* OFFA *rises, his face dark with anger.*

HROTHGAR. What has he sung? The King grows black as night,
And Elfrida glows crimson.

OFFA. Was this well?
I bade thee sing the praises of our guest,
And doubly hast thou sinned, thyself a guest,
Against our hospitable laws.

ÆTHELBERT. Not so.
Didst thou not bid me sing the fairest here?
Am I not Anglia's Scop, and can I sing
A fairer than my master's chosen bride?
This song, indeed, he made, King Æthelbert,
To greet the ear of only Elfrida.

OFFA. Would it had greeted then her ear alone.

THRYTHO. Nay, is the maid not fair? She chides him now
For singing her so loudly. See, her cheek
And bashful brow flush up at his approach.
Tell me, who is this singer?

OFFA. Anglia's Scop.

THRYTHO *(starts)*. How? Anglia's, and a Scop?

OFFA. What thinkest thou?

THRYTHO. Naught! 'Tis a fantasy, an idle dream.

OFFA. Tell me thy dream.

THRYTHO. He hath a watchful eye.
You fear not spies, my lord?

OFFA. I had not feared . . . .
I'll mark more closely. . . .

THRYTHO. Note him with thy daughter!
[*They watch.*

ELFRIDA. Did Anglia make this song?

ÆTHELBERT. Aye, liked it you?

ELFRIDA. Why hast thou made thee foes?
The King, alas,
And our strange guest, are angered at the slight
Offered her beauty. This was madly done.

ÆTHELBERT. Dost thou too blame?

ELFRIDA. I blame thy song, not thee.
[*They talk, she with uplifted face.*

THRYTHO. Notest thou, Offa?

OFFA. By the Christ, I note.

THRYTHO. Nay, but their bloods are young and anger fits not. [*She laughs softly.*

ELFRIDA. I prithee tell me, was this song the King's?

ÆTHELBERT. It was the King's.

ELFRIDA. Not thine? Indeed, methought . . . .
That look again! My father frowns on us. . . .
[*They part.*

OFFA. Yet! Yet! Tomorrow shall he answer me
For this night's folly.

THRYTHO. O, my lord, but hearken!

OFFA. What, Hrothgar there!

HROTHGAR. What would the King with me?

OFFA. Yon' Scop, yon' insolent tongued, thou notest, Hrothgar. . . .

A WARRIOR *(standing near the door).*
Who enters here?

WULFSTAN *(entering).* Let pass. I am a friend.
Offa! Where is the King?

OFFA. The King is here.
Who art thou criest so rudely at our feasting?

WULFSTAN. Protector of the people, I, thy thrall,
Am Wulfstan called, and come to warn the King.
[*A general movement of surprise.*

OFFA. What danger threats? Speak freely all thy heart.

WULFSTAN. Beyond the Dyke, Offa, that bears thy name,
The Welshmen gather head and hither march;
A desperate faction and unauthorised,
Led by a chief who claims his high descent
From ancient Kings, and kin to him o'erthrown—
Powys—and burning to retrieve his shame.

OFFA. How many are the foe?

WULFSTAN. A goodly band,
But ill-equipped to meet with ordered ranks.
At dawning I descried the cloud of dust
And distant gleam of spears, and heard the tale
From those who fled, of homesteads sacked and burned,
And plundered garners.

OFFA. Do they rise again,
When my own hand has marked their boundary?
Where is thy home?

WULFSTAN. A full day's journey south,
This side the Dyke.

OFFA. Say, whither tends their march?

WULFSTAN. Hither they lead their troops and hope to swell
With threats, or bribes, or hope of gain, their force.

OFFA. Myself will go. Small number will suffice.
Hereafter will I question thee again.
Go, Wulfstan, drink the mead, and for thy haste
Receive this ring of gold. We part at dawn.

THRYTHO. May victory wait upon thy banners, King.

OFFA. Lady, with thee one word. Wilt thou do this? [*Whispers.*

THRYTHO. Perchance.

OFFA. Canst thou refuse me this?

THRYTHO. So be it.

OFFA *(rising)*. To our dear daughter's care we do commit
Thee, dearest lady. Now a brief farewell.
We sleep to-night with helm, and shield, and spear,

And polished burnie, ready for the fray.
Hrothgar, thine ear.

[*Exeunt* OFFA *and* HROTHGAR, *followed by the Earls, Warriors, etc. As* ELFRIDA *and* THRYTHO *are following the Scop approaches.*

ÆTHELBERT. One word, sweet Elfrida.

ELFRIDA. Farewell!

ÆTHELBERT. Farewell?

ELFRIDA. I shall not see thee more
Till my lord come. The air is full of wars.
What may maids do in such a troublous time
Save fall to prayer?

ÆTHELBERT. And yet . . . Give me thy hand.

ELFRIDA. O'erbold art thou, I may not hearken thee.

ÆTHELBERT. One word, and all is clear.

[*She starts and looks at him.*

ELFRIDA. Ha, speak, I pray thee!
Speak that one word! Who art thou, Anglian Scop?

ÆTHELBERT. Another than I show.

ELFRIDA. Ah, do I dream?
Or do I see a hope beyond my dream?
Tell me, O tell me yet . . . .

THRYTHO. Lady, I pray thee.
The hour grows late.

[*She takes* ELFRIDA *by the hand.*

Farewell, O Anglian Scop.

[*Exeunt* ELFRIDA *and* THRYTHO.

HROTHGAR *(re-entering).*
Hearken thou, Egbert.

ÆTHELBERT. Speak, what wouldest thou?

HROTHGAR. Meet me within the hour beneath the pines.

ÆTHELBERT. What would'st thou there?

HROTHGAR. Friend, I have that to say
Touches thee close, and her.

ÆTHELBERT. What sayest thou?

HROTHGAR. Ah! dost thou start?

ÆTHELBERT. Thy meaning?

HROTHGAR. Hist! As clear
As kingly gold that gleams thro' singer's weed.
Here is no safety. Come within the hour.

[*Exeunt severally.*

ACT III.

Act III.

SCENE I.

An open space outside the Mead Hall. A belt of dark pines tossed by the wind. It is night, but the night is waning, and the stars are pale.

ÆTHELBERT *(entering).*
It is the hour, the place. What would he with me?
He comes. Hrothgar, well met.

HROTHGAR *(entering).* So, thou art here.

ÆTHELBERT. What would'st thou speak with me?

HROTHGAR. Counsel and warning.
There's danger threats thy tarrying, Anglian Scop!
Away, before the dawning line yon' cloud
With storm-dashed silver; hence, to Anglia
And wait what shall be.

ÆTHELBERT. Say, what dost thou fear?

HROTHGAR. I know not what I fear. There is no thunder
Yet bellowing tempest, but I mark the wind
Blowing up dust and leaves, and foretell change.

ÆTHELBERT. These are vain fears.

HROTHGAR. Well, mock them an' you will,
But you may mock the safer, when you're hence.

ÆTHELBERT. Why dost thou warn me? Hast thou learned . . . .

HROTHGAR. Oh, pardon—
I have learned naught but this, in Courts of Kings
The fool is safest. I know nothing—I.
Yet, ere he parted hence, a precious charge
Left Egfrith to my keeping.

ÆTHELBERT. Egfrith! Ha!

HROTHGAR.
Hrothgar, I pray thee, in my absence guard
With friendship for my sake the Anglian Scop.
Look to Elfrida, and if aught of ill
Threaten or him or her . . . . aye, dost thou note
The names thus linked? . . . I noted, but I asked
No questions. Hear me! Hence to Hareswood Fort,
There bid King Æthelbert keep watch and ward.
There is a serpent hissing near his dove,
Tho' yet the time's not ripe.

ÆTHELBERT. But Offa . . . .

HROTHGAR. Offa!
Anglia is fair, and Offa is in arms.
Go while thou mayest, none will miss the Scop,
Save one.

ÆTHELBERT. And must I leave her?

HROTHGAR. Canst thou take her?
The Scop—King Offa's daughter?

ÆTHELBERT. Then what help?

HROTHGAR. This only help. Within as brief a date
As speed may compass, let the Scop be hence,
The King be hither, armed and well equipped,
To claim his bride.

ÆTHELBERT. It shall be. In the week
Look thou to see the King. For Elfrida,
This token of my coming . . . .

HROTHGAR. Hark! A footstep.
One comes! Away! [*Going.*

ÆTHELBERT *(pointing).* O Hrothgar!

HROTHGAR *(returning and seizing his arm).* Dost thou stand
As tho' all motion froze within thee? Hence!
Why lookest thou so?

ÆTHELBERT. Hath she for thee no terror?
Bears she for thee no dread of woe unguessed,
No prophecy of evil, slow, unfailing?

HROTHGAR. Whom dost thou point at?

ÆTHELBERT. Look! What makes she here,
Yon' woman, at this hour?

HROTHGAR. What's that to thee?

ÆTHELBERT. Some evil's brewing.

HROTHGAR. Would'st thou taste the dregs? Away!

[*They go out together to the left,* HROTHGAR *urging* ÆTHELBERT. *As they disappear* THRYTHO *comes forward from the back, and turning her gaze slowly to the East, stands motionless beneath the shadowing pine trees.*

THRYTHO. One hour before the dawn! The wind blows chill
And sighs among the pine trees with a voice
Foretells a day of tempest. Be it so.
Cast forth thine arrows, speak among the hills,
Destroy a faithless generation, Thor!
Shatter the altars, Woden, of a faith
That dreams thee but a dream; its temples rend!
The King—how shall I greet him; how concede
The wished for bliss? O, with a maiden blush
And unshaked honour do thou shield my brow.
Thou knowest, Freya, how I loathe the embrace,
O worst—the embraces of this infidel!
Shrink from the bridal bed . . . O Woden, hear!
For thee and for thine honour yet I yield,
To mould him to his ruin, to thy praise.

[*Enter* OFFA.

OFFA. Lady, well met.

THRYTHO. Now King, thy words be brief,
Altho' a helpless stranger at thy Court,
My name to me is dear.

OFFA. And unto me,
Lady. And for the trust thy coming shows,
My entertainment of thee is o'erpaid.

THRYTHO. What would the King with me?

OFFA. One word, but one.

THRYTHO. Speak on nor hesitate.

OFFA. One poor request.
That in my absence thou wilt tarry here.

THRYTHO. This hast thou asked already, is this all?
Fear not to speak.

OFFA. Why do I hesitate?
Thrytho, dwell here for ever. Next my heart
I'll wear thee for a jewel. Start not so.
Whither, ah, whither, will thy footsteps stray,
Leaving this friendly court? And how shall I
Endure thy presence if thou wilt not grant
The boon I ask . . . .

THRYTHO. What boon, O King, what boon
Besides my presence hast thou asked?

OFFA. Thy love!
Strange passions shook me when I first beheld
Thee in the forest, and when from thine hand
I took this night the mead horn, in my blood
Like fire the longing surged to clasp thee. . . .

THRYTHO. Ha!
What sleight is this? Thou hast entrapped me here
To my dishonour. Is it thus the King
Observes the laws of hospitality?
Loose me! I'll cry aloud and wake the guard. . . .

OFFA. Go, thou art free, Thrytho. Against thy will
I'll not constrain thee; see, I loose my hold.

THRYTHO. Stand back, I'd speak with thee. What would the King?
In honour dost thou seek me as thy bride,
Or is this but the unconsidered heat
Of love unlicensed, living but to-day,
But for the present, on the morrow gone,
And its poor object ruined?

OFFA. No, by Christ!
Thrytho, I vow a faithful constancy.
Hear me! No word, no question crossed my lips
When thou hadst once forbidden. Who thou art
And whence thy comings know I not, nor care,

Since thou would'st have it secret. But, alas,
How would my æthelings brook an unknown bride?
And why should wedlock bind us? Is the priest
More strong than love in knitting our two hearts?

THRYTHO. I care not for the priest. But this know well,
Unless I have the title of thy Queen,
No love I grant thee. What! shall I become
Somewhat to whisper of behind closed doors?
Somewhat for maids to blush at as they pass!
While the King's gracious favour lasts, a Queen
Of mocking reverence, then a jest, a scorn!
How! Shall I see the laughter of contempt
Flush the pale cheek of sallow Elfrida,
While she enjoys the name of Anglia's Queen,
The love of . . . Ah! False friend, false friend, farewell!
'Tis nigh the dawn. [*Going.*

OFFA. Thrytho, return—one word.

THRYTHO. I cannot trust thee.

OFFA. Cannot trust me? See
How mild I'm grown! Ah, let me touch thy hand!
Thou dost but try me. Strive not. Thou could'st love—
O surely thou could'st love.

THRYTHO. A crown! A crown!
The honourable state, not thine to grant,
Fearing thy people's voices! Could I love!
Ah, could'st thou know!

OFFA. Then thus I claim thee mine.
Here with this ring, Thrytho, I make thee mine.

THRYTHO. This is not wedlock.

OFFA. Will not this suffice?
In God's sight we are one.

THRYTHO. Out, hypocrite!
Not Heaven, but men, will whisper as I pass.
What care the Gods? We live, whilst here, for men.

OFFA. By all that I hold sacred, none shall know!

THRYTHO. By all that I hold sacred none shall know,
Because it shall not be! Make me thy bride.
How should I shame thee, Offa? This distrust
Speaks thy love small.

OFFA. Ah, weep not, weep not thus.
One only way, I see, will make thee mine.
Still wear this ring, and when I come again
In sight of God and man, in Holy Church,
No ceremony missed I'll wed my bride.

THRYTHO. Yet one word more—the night now wanes apace—
Ere thou dost part, in hearing of thy Earls,
Declare thy promise made me—dost thou pause?

OFFA. It shall be as thou wilt. And now one kiss,
But one.

THRYTHO. I seal thy promise on thy lips.
[*Kisses him and exit.*

OFFA. It burns as fire. Ah! closer—she is gone!
What have I sworn? What promised?

[*Day breaks as the scene closes.*

Act III.

SCENE II.

THE MEAD HALL.

The Earls and Warriors are gathered together in the Hall. On a raised dais at the upper end, OFFA'S *throne, empty, but guarded. Enter* HROTHGAR.

HROTHGAR. Greeting, my lords! Are all assembled here?

ÆLFRIC. Yea, Hrothgar, all men wait to hear what word
The King will speak. Knowest thou these new tidings?

HROTHGAR. There are a thousand rumours to and fro
Flying, and all the air is thick with whispers.

ÆLFRIC. Whispers! How say you? Time is in my thought
When open speech held reign in Mercia.

AN EARL. When comes the King?

HROTHGAR. E'en now.

[*He goes to meet him.*

ÆLFRIC. His step is heavy;
Yet, I remember . . . .

2ND EARL. Peace, the King is entered.
[OFFA *enters with* HROTHGAR.

OFFA. The morn lowers on our parting, and the heavens,
Sullen with gathering cloud, portend a storm.
Thou hast done our bidding?

HROTHGAR. Yea! O battle-brave one.
[OFFA *takes his seat amid the acclaim of the Warriors.*

ÆLFRIC. Methinks his brow is changed and full of trouble.

OFFA *(to* HROTHGAR*)*. Go, bear this ring to her, and crave her presence.
[*Exit* HROTHGAR.

Where is the Anglian Scop?

A WARRIOR. O King, none knoweth.

OFFA. Fain would I speak with him. Go, seek him out.
[*Exit* WARRIOR.

Hear me, my lords. . . .

ÆLFRIC. Hearken, the King would speak.

OFFA. Let not the thing, most noble Earls, seem strange
That I shall speak, nor marvel at my words.

Lo, now, 'tis three years past I lost a queen,
(No need to speak her worth) and since three years
No greeting waits me after victory,
No voice of well-loved wife hails my return,
Nor can I deck with fine-wrought gold the brow
Of one calling me husband . . . .
My Lords, I weary of a lonely bed
And barren honours. I am not yet old,
Too old to feel my heart leap up for joy
Looking on woman's beauty. I have chosen
A mate more lovely than all Mercia holds,
Sent by the Christ, I think, to comfort me:
See where she comes to claim your fealty!

[THRYTHO *enters with* HROTHGAR *and* ELFRIDA.

The Lady Thrytho! Greet her as my bride.

[*General astonishment.*

HROTHGAR *(aside)* His bride!

[THRYTHO *goes forward to take her place by* OFFA, *who rises to greet her.*

ELFRIDA *(aside)*. Alas! my fear!

HROTHGAR *(aside)*. Wormwood and gall!

THRYTHO. My Lord the King, this tidings takes your lords
With joy past uttering. Look how all these gape
Silent upon you.

OFFA. Hrothgar! What, all speechless?

HROTHGAR. Offa, wæs hæl! I greet thee first and swear
Dearer than life I hold this precious pledge
Entrusted in thine absence to my care.

1ST EARL. Offa, wæs hæl! Be happy in thy bride.

2ND EARL. Offa, I pray thou prosper in the field,
And may the saints grant us to see again
A Lady of the Mercians like the dead.

[*A murmur of assent runs through the crowd.* OFFA *gnaws his lip.*

3RD EARL. Offa, we loved the dead, and she has left
No barren honours, but a hopeful prince
To gladden all thy days. But this new Queen
We know not, nor her comings, yet, wæs hæl!

[*Louder mutterings follow.*

THRYTHO. Better and better! Lo, my Lord the King,
Surely your dread is on them. *Yet, wæs hæl!*

OFFA. What! Ælfric, Harold, silent all?

[ÆLFRIC *steps forward.*

THRYTHO. Nay, peace!
Who is this grey bell-wether with his face
Full of most reverend foolishness? But mark him!
He ponders, sure, some mighty littleness,
O, he is swoln with words!

OFFA. What would'st thou, Ælfric?
Speak, thou wast father to mine infancy,
Speak on with loyal greeting to my Queen;
It is thy King that bids.

THRYTHO. Speak, noble Ælfric,
Nay fear not, lo! thy Queen attends to hear thee.

ÆLFRIC. Not fear, O lady, locked my lips. In truth
Time hath not been when any man might twit me
Of base acquaintance with a coward heart.
Ask, if thou wilt, of these: In Mercia
Silence before the uttering of speech
Is held no scorn. An' if thou scornest, lady,
Seek for no worship here in Mercia.

OFFA. Ælfric, too far . . . .

ÆLFRIC. O, King, thou bad'st me speak,
Hear me in patience, and I will be brief;
And yet be gentle, for old age is tedious,
And dwells on form when shorter words were best.
For all this yet in Mercia, I remember,

Time was, grey hairs were held in reverence.
But if thou scornest grey hairs, look to it, lady,
Thou gettest no reverence here in Mercia.

[OFFA *half rises from his seat.*

THRYTHO. Peace, my lord, peace! The flood is at the full!
This grey-head with his memories—nay, hear him,
He tickles his own ears and swells with wonder.

ÆLFRIC *(turning).* Hearken, O Mercians, hear me, noble Earls!
Not meet 'tis held amongst us that the crown
Circle an alien brow. This Offa knows,
And ye, my kinsmen. Speak, my Lord the King,
For there are many mutterings full of doubt,
Speak to thy loyal Earls. Whence is thy bride,
And from what friendly court seekest thy Queen?
Whence comes this Lady of the Mercians?
Say thou and all shall greet her; but in truth
If thou hold silence, verily, I tell thee
She gain no fealty in Mercia!

[*A murmur of applause among the Earls.*

OFFA *(rising).* Now, by the God of Heaven, who hears me swear,
Though thus long have I lent thee foolish hearing
Because this insolence held me in amaze
Almost beyond mine anger, I will hear thee
No more, nor any other. Your stiff necks

Shall bend yet to my bidding. Yea, methought
My lords had rendered fit response to greet
With loving honours whom I chose my Queen.
My Lords! My temper brooks not lowering brow
Of discontent, nor question of my acts.
Put off, I pray you, lest I cease to pray,
Ere my return, this dull reluctant cheer.
Away! we stay too long! [*Going.*

THRYTHO. By Thor and Woden!
Were I but King . . . . Heaven send more loyal hearts
Where Offa leads his warriors! None to turn
To hide their faces in the battle hour . . . .
[*A Warrior enters.*

WARRIOR. O Leader of the Mercians, royal Offa. . . .

OFFA. What wouldest thou? Ha, I bade thee on an errand. . . .
Where is the Scop?

WARRIOR. O King, we may not find him. . . .

THRYTHO. Fled, fled to Anglia, my lord the King,
With tidings of this proud conspiracy!

OFFA. How, Anglia turned a foe?

ELFRIDA. O hear, my Father,
And ere thou judgest . . . .

OFFA. Nay, I cannot think it.
Go, make enquiry, search, and having found him . . . .

THRYTHO. And yet, my lord, I swear they will not find him!

OFFA. Sound to the march! Lady, farewell and prosper!
My Lords, I leave you, but I come again.

[*Exeunt in one direction* OFFA, *and his Warriors and Attendants; in another* ELFRIDA *and* THRYTHO. *The Earls withdraw to the back and hold low speech together.* HROTHGAR *stands motionless till the gleam of helm and spear, filing past the open door, ceases, and the marching of the Warriors is heard no more. Then he comes into the foreground.*

HROTHGAR *(soliloquises).* A shepherd bade a she-wolf share his cot,
And, when the poor sheep bleated on his folly,
Chided their insolent crying, and so left them.
But first he called an old wolf from the woods,
And, *In my absence guard for me,* he prayed,

My she-wolf from these angry, ravening sheep.
Ha! Wolf and she-wolf met together thus—
What ending to the story? . . . Offa's Queen!
My brother's bride! beyond my wildest fancy!
O! I have loved thee, Thrytho! Seek the world
For twenty such as Offa, thou shalt find
Their sum of love not half what's mine to give.
Go to her! Tell her! Trust her woman's heart
At least to pardon! I am mad to dream
A woman's heart in her. O foolish King!
An elemental being of the wild—
How would she hate the hand that should uncrown
Those curléd locks, and offer love instead.
What if I play with these and urge their wrath
To vent itself? My hand must not be seen—
I know her high ambition, know what pride
In her supplies the place of woman's love . . . .
The more love mine! stronger! for me, for her,
To enfold us both, and overflow the bounds
Of what I dreamed of love. . . .

1ST EARL. Hrothgar, these tidings trouble thee?

HROTHGAR. My Lords,
I am all amazed, yet may not blame the King.
Three years has Offa mourned the loss of her,
Peace-weaver truly called, who shared his throne,
Though I perchance, having a sister dead,
And jealous of her due, might think at heart
That lesser worth hath been more deep bewept.

ÆLFRIC. Are there not noble damsels in our midst?
From these let Offa choose a bride, or seek
From friendly courts his queen. What need to wed
Since Egfrith lives?

BYRHTNOTH. Old man, let Offa wed
There where his heart is fixed, nor question thou
The Ruler of the Mercians.

ÆLFRIC. Saxon Churl!
Thy father fled, an outlaw, to this Court:
What's Mercia's name to thee?

BYRHTNOTH. Peace, Greybeard, peace!
Too weak to grasp the spear, the burnie's weight
Too old to bear. Would'st wed thy milk-faced maid
To Offa, claim blood royal . . . ?

HROTHGAR. Byrhtnoth, peace!
Peace, noble Ælfric! What! is this a time
For private jars . . . ?

YOUNG EARL. Ælfric, my arm is strong
To wield the ash staff, iron tipped, and thou,
Byrhtnoth, shalt find my blade . . . .

BYRHTNOTH. A match, a match!
Come, beardless boy, the raven's food ere night!
The eagle spurns such dainty fare . . . .

HROTHGAR. My Lords!
What madness this? Ælfric! Thy nodding eld
Were better bent on peace.

ÆLFRIC. Come, Æthelwulf,
More meet occasion . . . .

BYRHTNOTH. Nithling! Dost withdraw!
For Offa and for Thrytho!
[*They close in fight.*

HROTHGAR. Hear me, noble Lords . . . .
[*Suddenly* THRYTHO *is heard singing. The combatants pause. All stand silent to hear her.*

THRYTHO *(within).*
Red, red in his rising the sun,
And mists hang dull in the East.
O Woden, O Thunor, how speeds this day?
What ending, O Wierd, for the battle play?
Whom dost thou call to thy feast,
O Thor, to Valhalla?
When the blades are broken and strife is done,
When the joy of the raven and wolf is begun,
And the far-flying eagle.

1ST EARL. What song is this?

2ND EARL. No words of blessing sure,
Thus Thrytho greets the day. Hearken again!

THRYTHO *(within, sings).*

O Christ, tho' others crown thee Lord,
Not mine, not mine the hand that weaves
The victor's crown, whose heart yet cleaves
To other Gods, to other Kings,
And mocks thee, resting high adored
Above an earth where yet there clings
Some glory Woden's presence leaves.

Canst thou command the bolt that wings
Through clouds its path, to thee unknown?
Still Thunor's might is all his own,
His darkness mantles not thy form,
His sun no glory on thee flings,
Nor can we hear thee when his storm
Proclaims him Lord and God alone!

[*A long silence of astonishment.*

ÆLFRIC. O Hrothgar, Byrhtnoth, say, what song is this?
To what grim ghosts of bygone fear this canticle?
By Christ, whom I adore, I will not bend
My head or knee before her, nor receive
The mead cup from her hands. . . . What may prevail,
Hrothgar, to turn King Offa from this madness?

HROTHGAR. I know not. Yield, my lords, or seek far hence
Another friendly lord, whose hand as his

Wearies not in bestowing gifts, whose will
May bend to yours, if such a lord there be.
Then Offa, if he find his council thinned,
His loyal subjects scattered, she alone
Left to him, he may call you back, perchance,
Entreat your pardon . . . .

ÆLFRIC. Hrothgar, tho' you scoff,
You point our way to freedom. Come, my lords,
Come, ride this day to Hareswood Fort, to wait
In safety there, the issue of the event.

1ST EARL. I with thee.
2ND EARL. And myself.
3RD EARL. Bring horse and spear. . . .

OTHERS. We tarry here with Hrothgar . . . .

EARLS. Hence, with speed.

HROTHGAR. Ælfric, you have bred,
You and your party, strife and wrath this day—
A foul rebellion 'gainst your lawful King.
Leave me, go, get you gone. Your strife has stirred
A deadly business.

ÆLFRIC. On then, let us part.
Hrothgar, you blame, and yet methinks you play
A double part, nor do your words ring true.
We tarry—come, my lords. [*Exeunt.*

HROTHGAR. Aye, get you gone.
I am grown a thing most hateful to myself,
A traitor. Did I urge them to this deed?
Could I have stayed them? I reproach myself
Too harshly, I have set the end in sight,
That end, her love. I needs must work them to it.
I love thee, Thrytho! I will swim all seas,
Climb every hill that lies 'twixt thee and me,
To clasp thee once; and having clasped, to hold!
[*Exit.*

ACT IV.

Act IV.

SCENE I.

THE COURT OF CHARLEMAGNE.

EGFRITH *and* ALCUIN.

ALCUIN. Scarce come, and yet you bend your backward gaze
So soon to Mercia? This will breed, I fear,
Suspicion in the Court of Charlemagne.
They'll think you fail to mark the honour shown,
The greeting, full of hospitable love,
Bestowed already upon us; think you lack
In graciousness and friendship. What's the cause
Of this so sudden flight?

EGFRITH. A heavy dream.

ALCUIN. You scoff me. Be advised . . . .

EGFRITH. By Christ, no scoff!
I left a precious pledge in Mercia,
A friend I loved, mid princes (think on this!)
A dear possession in a den of thieves,
The Anglian Æthelbert in Mercia's Court.

ALCUIN. The Anglian King! How mean you?

EGFRITH. As a Scop
Disguised he came, for love of Elfrida,
And there, despite my prayer, he tarries still

(If dreams are troth), unguarded; at his side
No trusty comrade. What if one suspect
And breathe it to my Father?

ALCUIN. This distrust
Shows foul in you. All know him for a prince,
A ruler full of virtue and piety.
Has he not proved a Father to the Church,
A Christian monarch?

EGFRITH. Go, go, he has given
Some of his idle treasure to the priests
To pray for his redemption—cheaply bought!
Alcuin, we know him well. My Father? True.
I wrong my birth in speaking him a vane
That turns with every wind, but in my heart
I know I wrong not him.

ALCUIN. What was your dream?

EGFRITH. I saw where Æthelbert and Elfrida
In likeness of two doves sat on one bough,
A swaying pine branch (every cone and twig
Distinct before me) and below them lay
A monstrous serpent coiled, with gem-like eyes
And scales that glittered on its burnished neck.

ALCUIN. What then?

EGFRITH. No more.

ALCUIN. No more? Is this your fear?

EGFRITH. Patience, good Father. There I saw
the twain,
The serpent watching. Then I waked in fear,
And later slept, and saw a sea of blood.
Far as the eye might reach, it rolled its waves,
While storm clouds gathered ever and anon.
I saw a bark, storm-driven across that flood,
And knew a Horror steered it, if indeed
It drove not blindly in the gale that whipped
To white that crimson! drove, till, far away,
The tempest swallowed it, and from the dark
Where lightnings everlasting glared, and crashed
Eternal thunder, there came forth one shout
As if the Gods acclaimed a conqueror
In fabled halls our sires Valhalla named.

ALCUIN. You did but dream.

EGFRITH. You feel it not?

ALCUIN. In truth,
A dreadful dream, and yet, Egfrith, my son,
No more than this.

EGFRITH. No more perchance to thee;
To me a warning vision. Call me mad,
Credulous, fearful, I go hence to-day,
This day! Your blessing, Father, ere I part.

ALCUIN. Patience, this mood will pass.

EGFRITH. 'Twill never pass.
O never, Father, never, if my fear
Whisper me truly! I must disobey,
In all things else submissive to your will,
In this alone.

ALCUIN. Then be it so, my son,
To stay thee, is, I see, beyond my power.
Go, call thy followers; I will plead thy cause
Meanwhile with Charlemagne, that, ere thou partest
All may be well. This journey grieves my soul.
[*Exeunt.*

Act IV.

SCENE II.

A room in the Palace. THRYTHO *is seated alone, her chin rested on her hands, her eyes brooding.* HROTHGAR *enters behind her.*

HROTHGAR. Alone! and rapt in thought?

THRYTHO. Ha! thou art come.
What would'st thou with me?

HROTHGAR. Didst not bid me wait
To know thy will?

THRYTHO. Methinks 'twas even so,
The hour is barely past. Well art thou come!
Mark now my wish. An hour, I asked one hour
To think how I might wipe away this stain. . . .

HROTHGAR. No stain on thee!

THRYTHO *(rising and pacing the floor).* No stain! O Thor and Woden!
Mocked o'er the mead cup! Scorned in open day!
Forsaken, shamed, disgraced! O but what matter?
Shall then the wanderer look to find a champion?
Nay, seeking this she gains but what she earns—
This scorn!

HROTHGAR. O lady, hear me . . . .

THRYTHO. Dost deny it?
Nay, Hrothgar, nay, it runs on all men's lips,
This scorn of me, rebellion 'gainst King Offa!
Laugh not at heart, O Hrothgar! I am woman!
[*She approaches him.*

Laugh not at heart, seeing me so unqueened.
Methinks thou only, thou at least wilt prove
A friend to trust in. . . .

HROTHGAR. Friend! Aye, more than friend,
Dear lady Thrytho—dearer than my tongue
Can utter. Help thee? Grant me then some task,
Some deed to prove me . . . .

THRYTHO. Hrothgar! seek them out!
Track them thro' marsh and moorland, let mine eyes
Yet look on Ælfric, lying in his blood,
Or Egbert, bound and fettered—'twas his song
First taught them how to slight me—haul him here
That I may see his harping fingers hacked
With keen sword blade; or pluck his fabling tongue
Forth from his throat. Let Elfrida look on—
She loves him, mark me!

HROTHGAR *(starting)*. Ha, the serpent's hiss!
May Christ and all the Saints defend me yet!

Thrytho! her eyes are fixed and glazed in wrath,
She trembles. Hear me, this were deadly sin
To harm the stranger in our midst. Besides,
Egfrith, ere yet he parted hence for France
Left me this wandering Scop, a sacred charge
And such I hold him.

THRYTHO *(arrested)*. Ha, what sayest thou?
A sacred charge. Tell me, who is this Egfrith?

HROTHGAR. King Offa's only son.

THRYTHO. *His only son.*
Yea, and this King to be holds a poor bard—
A wandering Scop—so sacred? Tell me, Hrothgar,
Where is this Scop to-day? Why came he not
With all the rest to hail King Offa's Queen?

HROTHGAR. He left the court at dawning.

THRYTHO. He is fled.

HROTHGAR. He is returned to Anglia, to his lord.

THRYTHO. To Anglia? Perchance to Hareswood Fort.

HROTHGAR. I cannot tell thee.

THRYTHO. Come, anon, anon,
I know thou'lt tell me, Hrothgar . . . .
Give me thy hand, thou who deniest my asking,
Thou, my friend Hrothgar. See how mild I'm grown.
Let the Scop pass. I will not urge thee, friend,
Against thy vow. I must sit by and hear
On all men's lips, *how Ælfric, noble Ælfric,*
'Midst all the applauding earls that heard him speak,
Dared wag a fearless tongue, and hurl the truth
Even in this woman's teeth, despite the King.
And Hrothgar? Hrothgar might not lift a blade
To crush rebellion—Offa's governor.
[*She flings his hand from her.*
O! all your faithfulness, I see, was feigning.
I thought you true! So far my heart confided.
Tutored far hence, where word to deed was comrade,
Not bred in Courts, not quick to find a foe
Where friendship's form is borrowed. Ah, too weak,
Too woman-weak to guard myself from harm;
Too trustful. I am ruined. Would to heaven
I had not come among you. Get you gone;
I know not why I called you, trusted you.
Go, tell your warriors of my tears, and scoff
At my simplicity.

HROTHGAR. O Christ! O Christ!
O fairer than I dreamed thee! Lady . . . .
Thrytho . . . .

THRYTHO. I bade thee part.

HROTHGAR. Lift up again, lift up
Those tear-washed eyes, I pray thee. I am here,
I live to serve thee.

THRYTHO. Go, thou mockest, go.

HROTHGAR. By God, I mock not, Thrytho.
Feigning words
Thou speakest vainly, thinking to deceive.
I am not Offa, do not hold thee saint,
Dream thee not mild and tender, woman-weak.
I know thee better, love thee better, I!
More proud than Lucifer, yea, more high of heart
Than he who fell from Heaven, relentless, hard,
Thirsty of blood. Thou can'st not blight nor blind
With thine, mine eyes. I love thee, Thrytho, I,
Who would not trust thee for one moment's space,
Nor dream that thou could'st love, when, the first
heat
Of passion spent, thy sated mood should turn
To loathing of its object. Yet, ah yet,
'Twould over-weigh a whole life's stagnant round
Of dull content, that hour, ere yet thy mood
Was changed . . . .

THRYTHO. How sayest thou? Dost thou talk so hotly?
Be swift to point thy meaning.

HROTHGAR. At what price,
Say Thrytho, dost thou value Ælfric's head?

THRYTHO. Ha! Yet I scarcely trust thee—speak again.

HROTHGAR. In this I am lost for ever—this I know—
But not for naught. You catch my meaning there?
You pause.

THRYTHO. As rapt in wonder by your words.
You know me then! *(aside)* or think it. I'll outwit
Your cunning yet and disappoint your hope!
[*Aloud.*
I will not play a part. Let me but look
On him who would o'erturn me, overthrown,
Claim thy reward.

HROTHGAR. So be it.

THRYTHO. Look to it,
Thou look on me no more until that day
When thou shalt bid me also come to gaze
On my desire, my fill.

HROTHGAR. What I have sworn
I keep. Farewell.

THRYTHO. Until that hour, farewell.
[*Exeunt severally.*

ACT V.

Act V.

SCENE I.

The Mead Hall.

A great fire burns on the hearth. It is the hour of sunset. Three Aged Women *sit spinning.*

1st Woman. There rode, ere dawning, towards the forest land,
A company of warriors armed for fight.

2nd Woman. I heard they go to seek the rebel earls.

3rd Woman. Ill-omened wedlock that is sealed with blood!

1st Woman. Sorrow befall the union of strange faiths!

2nd Woman. Fate weaves the marriage garb with flecks of red!

1st Woman. When comes the Lady Thrytho?

2nd Woman. Who can say?

3rd Woman. She walks alone. Who knows what thoughts are hers?

2nd Woman. The task she set draws swiftly to its close.

1ST WOMAN. Ay, swift as life! Rise, let us leave our wheels,
Elfrida comes . . . .

2ND WOMAN. Say, what shall be her share?

3RD WOMAN. One of these three, and store of heavy tears. [*Enter* ELFRIDA.

ELFRIDA. Ye weave strange texture—say, what robe is this?
I prithee, Mother, tell me?

1ST WOMAN. 'Tis a shroud.
[*Exit.*

ELFRIDA. O Christ! strange work—ill omened is thy wheel.
What is thy task?

2ND WOMAN. I weave the bridal robe.
[*Exit.*

ELFRIDA. O all too true—this union's knit by death!
And thou?

3RD WOMAN. Maiden, I weave what no man knows,
And these spin to my bidding, and fill in
The pattern of my weaving. [*Exit.*

ELFRIDA *(alone).* O my heart
Is heavy with strange sorrow, and their words,
Too well attunéd to this fateful hour,
Increase its bitterness. . . .
And yet I have a hope, a glimmering hope!
What meant my uncle's whisper? Must I think
I did but dream? . . . . He could not mock me, sure:
A night and yet a day, and when the night
Is come again, comes he who went from thee
Three days agone a Scop, a Scop no more.
A Scop no more . . . Another than I show . . .
Another!—then a greater? One whose love
Is mine by right? Then this were—Æthelbert!
Aye! Æthelbert, and joined against my Father!
Æthelbert, Mercia's foe! . . . .
There is some riddle here I cannot read.
An' I can get no answer, Heaven direct me,
The puzzling on't is like to break my heart
Ere I may see all plain.

[*She is slowly crossing the hall when* THRYTHO *and a Warrior are seen to the right, approaching.*

ELFRIDA *(withdrawing into the shadow).*
Ah, she! To meet her now, to cross her path . . .
And yet have I a word that must be spoken!
I'll wait, I'll mark my time . . . .

THRYTHO *(to the Warrior)*. Where I appointed tarry thou. The signal
Thou knowest, and thy service.

WARRIOR. Yea, O Thrytho.

THRYTHO. Away then! Dost thou pause?

WARRIOR. O Lady Thrytho,
I fear the King.

THRYTHO. There is a Queen in Mercia!
Go thou, and see thou fail not of my bidding.

[*Exit* WARRIOR. THRYTHO *comes slowly forward and stands before the great hearth fire.*

Ere yet my name be mingled with the dead,
To pluck from hence a brand, and o'er their heads,
Far streaming in the night to shake abroad
The red, red, locks of Thunor; or destroy
The tortured image of a dying Christ,
And raise instead the fruitful form of her,
To look on whom would blind and blight their gazing,
Who knew her not a Goddess; or to wait,
Till, in the slow accomplishment of years,
The picture of the Past were woven and flung
Into oblivion by the shaping Wierd,
And all begins anew? Then should I rest,
And men no more should curse me, and the Gods

Must work their own salvation. Woe is on me!
For I have heard that crying out of Asgard,
And I must answer, for they call, they call:
Shall Woden sleep for ever? Shall the Gods
Waste their immortal youth in endless exile,
And none to help? Yea, I am here, All-father,
I grope to do thee service!

HROTHGAR *(entering)*. Hail, O Thrytho!

THRYTHO. Ha, Hrothgar, thou art come. I looked for thee.

HROTHGAR. Yea, I would speak.

THRYTHO. What wouldest thou speak with me?

HROTHGAR. The day is done, and yet our warriors come not.

THRYTHO. Art thou so eager, Hrothgar, for their coming?
Patience, their feet are even at the door.

HROTHGAR. I can nor see nor hear.

THRYTHO. From far I see;
Far off I hear their footsteps from the fray
Returning, and the distant clash of swords,
The rattle of the burnie's polished rings,
And heavy beating of the raven's plumes.
He tracks their path, and where the blood-drops fall
Hovers, O Hrothgar, over Ælfric slain.

ELFRIDA *(aside)*. O God, that I must hear, and yet keep silence.

THRYTHO. See, Hrothgar, far beneath the trees the gleam,
The glint of battle dress and iron-tipped spear!
The yellow rounded shield like a full moon!
Our warriors come from fight! Ha! Shrinkest thou?
Look in mine eyes: come, watch with me this triumph,
My triumph, ours.

[*As they are going,* ELFRIDA *comes forward and kneels.*

THRYTHO. Ha! Mercian Elfrida.

HROTHGAR. How, Elfrida!

ELFRIDA. Hail to thee, Lady Thrytho,
And hear, I pray thee.

THRYTHO. Hail to thee, O maiden!
I knelt to thee at first; now art thou low
Before my feet. Arise.

ELFRIDA. Nay, hear me, first.
I have a prayer to make unto your pity—
A humble prayer.

THRYTHO. Speak on.

ELFRIDA. Lady, thou knowest
Full well beseems the name of Peaceweaver
The queenliest, and thou art Queen in Mercia.

THRYTHO. What is thy asking?

ELFRIDA. Hear me yet, I pray.
There is a rumour runs on all men's lips,
(Alas, they would have kept it from my knowledge
Until too late it broke like tempest on me)
Of war and civil bloodshed in our land,
Alas, this brings no garland to thy brow!
For surely, tho' they spake high boasting words,
One look of love will bring them to thy feet.
I have seen rougher tamed. If these have erred,
I pray thee, pardon. For, when yet a child,
This Ælfric loved me; led me often forth
Where the young spring tricked all the wood in green,
And rocked me in his shield, and told me tales
Of the elder time. And for the rest I plead.

THRYTHO. A tender litany, my pale-faced maiden!
Is this thy asking?

ELFRIDA. Yea.

THRYTHO. What, is this all?
Hearest thou not what winds are whispering,
That Æthelbert leads on the rebel Earls?

ELFRIDA. False, false! I swear he hath no part in this.

THRYTHO. Hast thou no prayer for him?

ELFRIDA. No prayer for him?
Yea, yea, I pray for all, as thou art woman.

THRYTHO. As I am woman, outraged, shamed, disgraced . . . .

[*A sudden clamour is heard without.*

HROTHGAR. Hearken! What is that crying in the Courtyard?

THRYTHO *(triumphantly)*. Thy suing is too late!

ELFRIDA. Say not too late.

THRYTHO. It is too late. Hearken!

ELFRIDA. My uncle Hrothgar,
Hast thou no comfort?

HROTHGAR. Oh!

ELFRIDA. Turn not away!

THRYTHO. They come!

ELFRIDA. What is that cry?

[*A Maiden, followed by several others, rushes into the room. Without is a sound of wailing.*

1ST MAIDEN. O wellaway!

ELFRIDA. What means this crying?

2ND MAIDEN. Gentle Mercian lady,
My father is slain this day by Hareswood fort.

3RD MAIDEN. Alas, my brother is wounded to the death!

HROTHGAR. Away, sweet Elfrida!

[*The crying grows again.*

ELFRIDA. Hearken, again!
A greater woe yet follows. What is this?

[*The warriors enter bearing on a bier the dead body of* ÆLFRIC.

What do they bear? Give me thy hand, my maiden!
I have a sick fear sitting at my heart. . . .

HROTHGAR. A dreadful burden, Ælfric's lifeless form!

THRYTHO. Uncover, I pray, and let me look on him.

HROTHGAR. How many of the noble Earls are fallen?
How went the fight?

A WARRIOR. Harold is dead, and Alfred . . .

[*As he utters these names the members of* OFFA'S *household break into fresh laments.*

Wulfred and Beornulf, and the noble Edgar,
With many others fallen in the fray
On this side, and on theirs. Yet, whom we might,
We spared, and having Ælfric, brought him thence.
Good Gold-friends were they all in days gone by.

HROTHGAR. Tell me, the King of Anglia, lives he yet?

WARRIOR. O Hrothgar, nothing saw we of the King,
And nothing heard.

ELFRIDA. Now to the Saints be praise.

THRYTHO. Thou liest, fellow, for the King himself,
Even the King of Anglia, led these rebels.

WARRIOR. Nay, but we saw him not, we heard no word,
Till, at the last, even as the battle stood
In wavering uncertainty, there ran
Through both our camps a whisper: *Anglia comes*

To drive us hence, as from his garden ground
A man might drive two quarrelling dogs. Then turned we
Our faces home for Mercia. But for those,
Whether they yet remained, or went to meet him,
I know not.

THRYTHO. So, this Anglia liveth yet
To yield a refuge to the Mercian rebels.
What sayest thou, Hrothgar?

HROTHGAR *(gazing on* ÆLFRIC'S *face).*
If he lives 'tis well. . . .
O, I could weep! My tears are turned to fire!
Cover, I pray, I loved him when a child.
Take up your burden.

[*The Warriors lift the bier.*

ELFRIDA. Yea, and let us follow,
And all about him set the hallowed flames
Of tapers, that shall break his rest no more;
And weave for him the burying robe, and sing
Sad elegies; we who have set our wheels
So few bright days ago, to love and laughter.
Come, then, my maidens.

[*All go out.* HROTHGAR *and* THRYTHO *are left alone.*

THRYTHO. So long thou hast gazed, O friend, upon the dead,
Surely his sleep is dreaming in thine eyes.
Tell me thy dream, then.

HROTHGAR. O, this was our work,
Thrytho, your work and mine! Should it not fright
Our insolent bloods to look upon the dead?
Our pride, ambition, all our lustful heats
And wayward passions?

THRYTHO. Come, you moralise.
Do you repent the deed?

HROTHGAR. If 'twere to do
Instead of done, it should be. Even then,
Yea, to the hundredth time, I'd pity him
While my hand plunged the spear. Thou knowest not this,
A saving grace common to all save fiends?

THRYTHO. At least I am honest; 'tis a grace more rare.
You have served me, Hrothgar, and I think at heart,
Despite your bitter speech, you love me still.

HROTHGAR. Aye, with a love more bitter than my speech,
Galling my heart with unfulfilled desire.

[THRYTHO *flings herself with a restless gesture into a seat which stands in shadow. She watches* HROTHGAR, *whose face is lit up by the glow of the fire on the hearth.*

THRYTHO. Thou lovest me yet!

HROTHGAR. I love thee. I have said it.
I love thee more than life!

THRYTHO. Aye, more than life!
Hear me, my Hrothgar. In the wood to-day
I walked alone. I heard the ravens talking.
They talked of thee and of this love of thine,
And called it death.

HROTHGAR. I do not fear their talk.
Were thy lip poison, were thy love a flame
To burn through all my bones, I would not keep
My lip from thine.

THRYTHO. Hear yet another thing.
I heard the eagle crying to his mate.
He saw King Offa's banners on the breeze
And spake of thee and me. If this should fall,
What were the end, O friend, Offa being come,
For thee and me? The eagle spoke it, death.

HROTHGAR. I have dared all for thee. Wilt thou for me
Dare naught?

THRYTHO. What hast thou dared, thou, for my love?

HROTHGAR. What have I dared? My name, my peace of conscience,
The praise of all good men, King Offa's favour,
Æthelbert's death, and Ælfric's.

THRYTHO. Thou hast dared
Greatly, and I am bound by it. Dost repent?

HROTHGAR. Thinkest thou that I may bide in Mercia,
Having bartered all, to see thee Offa's bride?

THRYTHO. Never shalt thou, thou who hast loved so well,
Behold me Offa's bride.

HROTHGAR. What sayest thou?
Thou wilt away with me? Bethink thee, Thrytho,
Having so sinned as I, there is one road,
But one road open, and no turning back.

THRYTHO. But one!

HROTHGAR. I will not tread that way alone.

THRYTHO. In truth thou shalt not tread that way alone,
O Hrothgar! Thou shalt have companioning
On thy forth-faring.

HROTHGAR. Thrytho, let us hence,
To-night, at once, before the King return.
Look on me! Do I show as one whose love
Brooks harsh refusal, chilling, cold delay?
Thou lovest me? Thou wilt away with me?

THRYTHO. I never said I loved thee, never plighted
To thine my troth. We, met together once,
Make there no breakless contract. On the morrow
Shall we not part, forget that this has been,
Nor dream of its return?

HROTHGAR. Forget, forget?
I see 'tis all in vain! 'Twas not, for this,
Not because hot intemperance quite unmans
My better reason, not for one wild hour
Of nameless passion that I sue to thee:
'Tis that I *love* thee, Thrytho, more than life.
See, were I what thou thinkest me, only that,
I'd grow to hate thee in a little space,
Weary of thee, be sated . . . . 'Tis not this!
My love is everlasting, and will live
When we're mouldered together in one tomb,

Naught wotting what the bards, in nights of Winter,
Tell of our love as of a bygone thing.

THRYTHO. Too much thou askest.

HROTHGAR. I will take no less.

THRYTHO. If I refuse thee this?

HROTHGAR. Bethink thee, Thrytho,
That Offa will not hold a bride unfaithful.

THRYTHO *(rising)*. Ha! sayest thou? I thank thee for that word
To nerve my resolution. *(As if to herself)*. Then in vain
I strive, and this must be. Give me thy hand.
Could I love any, surely it were thee.
And what if love were strong enough for this,
To promise all thine asking?

HROTHGAR. And to keep it!

THRYTHO. To promise and to keep, more than thine asking!
What then of recompense? Of love what measure?
Look in mine eyes.

HROTHGAR. I look.

THRYTHO. What seest thou there?

HROTHGAR. A lie of love that I shall turn to truth!
Swear, swear that thou wilt love me.

THRYTHO. Shall I swear
Of endless love to him that loves me not,
Or loves so faintly?

HROTHGAR. Faintly?

THRYTHO. Yet, O, Hrothgar,
Within the shadows of a willow grove,
There is a bower, a featly woven arbour.
A fresh stream murmurs near, and all about
The ground is strewn with summer's early buds
And resin-scented cones from one great pine,
That hangs from the thin border of a wood
His wide, far-reaching bough. And there, to-night
Shall not the moon look down on thee and me,
Calling the stars to wonder over us,
Bidding the night wind stir the loosened cloud
Of night dark hair about this arm (behold,
When hast thou seen a whiter?) that enfolds thee.
Yea and that wind that whispers overhead
And lingers on my brow, shall bear away
Thy words as thin as air, thy vows more light,
And all thy broken promises of love.

HROTHGAR. Have I not proved my love? What
wilt thou more?
What spell is in thine eyes to draw my soul
Before their gaze?

THRYTHO. So light a thing I ask thee—
This Scop that comes and goes . . . .

HROTHGAR. Tempt me no further.

THRYTHO. Thou lovest me not? Yet have men
sworn me fair.
Look on me, Hrothgar, look ere thou deny me!
Tell me if lips like these have ever asked,
If eyes like these implored, if such white ears,
Half hidden by masses of such cloudy locks,
Have listened, ever, since the world began,
To be refused by thee! Ah, closer, closer,
And hear my heart beat! Wilt thou let it throb
With eager blood expectant, ah! how oft,
While a cold sullen *nay* is on thy lips?
Ay, nearer yet! I do not say I love thee,
Nor love nor hate. Thou lovest me! There's thy
guerdon.
Rapture of Love o'er pays the pangs o'th' lover,
And thou shalt love me ever, drawing breath
Quicker for sobs of passion! Thou shalt love,
Knowing I love thee not, nor weigh thy life
As dear as one curled lock that shades my brow!
And loving and unloved, here shalt thou lie,

Thus pillowed, and breathe out thy soul to me!
And the Scop's secret . . . . 'Tis a small request,
Poor payment for such lodging! . . . Come! thy
lips!
I bend my ear . . . .

HROTHGAR. O Christ! 'Tis past my power!
She drives me, tempts me, lures me with her eyes,
Her parted lips, that midnight coloured hair,
All, all of her! There's not one limb, one lock
But I would . . . . O! . . . .
O God! Askest thou proof of love like mine?
This Scop is Anglian Æthelbert. He comes
Once more to Mercia (O those eyes of thine),
Lo, when this moon thou speakest on lights again
To-morrow's dark, he comes to Elfrida,
When all are wrapped in sleep, to take her hence
To Anglia and to safety. Wouldst thou more?
Release me!

THRYTHO. Go. I would no more but this.

[*Kisses him.*

This, and farewell.

HROTHGAR. I am lost.

THRYTHO. Farewell, O Hrothgar.
If it were death, this kiss . . . .

HROTHGAR. Why dost thou talk
Of death to me?

THRYTHO. Death ever dogs the steps
Of passion such as thine, and yet, I swear
If I were strong, as I am woman weak,
Thou shouldest meet death none otherwise than this.
Go hence.

HROTHGAR. Thine oath!

THRYTHO. Yea I have sworn, O Hrothgar,
All the Gods heard me and the Thunderer
Shook down great drops—only pale Hela laughed
Among her shadows. That I swore, I keep.

[*He goes slowly from her.*

HROTHGAR *(going, yet gazing as one entranced).*
O beautiful, most beautiful! Thine eyes!
Thy hair! Thy lips! I have thy kiss at heart
To save me, or to slay me. [*Exit.*

THRYTHO. *Or to slay!*

[*There is a pause, during which she stands motionless, rigid, her eyes fixed on the shaken curtain which he has raised to pass. Then she lifts her hand. Without is a sound of singing that draws nearer.*

WARRIORS *(singing without).*
Offa led men against the Western folk,
Warriors in battle weeds against the Welsh. . . .

[*Their voices die away.*

THRYTHO *(with a gesture of despair).*
Offa! the King! Offa is come again.

WARRIORS *(without).*
Great Offa, giver of the twisted gold,
The battle-brave, the breaker of the ring. . . .

THRYTHO. Hrothgar is dead, and Offa comes in triumph,
The King to claim me. Whom I love I slay;
And whom I scorn, even him I crown with love.
What service, O ye Gods, have I withheld you?
Yet witness me, All-Father!

WARRIORS *(without).*
So Offa's boar crests triumphed on the breeze,
With burnies all ablaze, with brandished blades,
So came the King to Mercia, conqueror.

Curtain.

Act V.

SCENE II.

THE MARRIAGE OF OFFA AND THRYTHO.

OFFA *and* THRYTHO *pass over in state, the Bards singing before them. As* OFFA *reaches the steps of the throne he turns, and one gives him the Mead Cup into his hand.*

OFFA. Now let the glee-wood pause, and give to gladness
Leisure to look in its own eyes and laugh,
Beholding them so radiant.

AN EARL. Brave in battle!
All bliss be on thee and thy bride!

OTHERS. Hail Offa!

[*A Messenger enters.*

OFFA. What is thine errand?

MESSENGER. These, my Lord, from Egfrith!

[*He hands a missive to* OFFA, *who beckons a clerk to him.*

OFFA. From Egfrith! [*His brow clouds.*

ELFRIDA. Speak, O say my brother comes!

THE CLERK. Lady, he comes indeed.

ELFRIDA. Now my heart's lightened!

OFFA. Comes he in truth so soon!

THRYTHO. Who comes, my Lord?

OFFA. None that shall break our pledge to happiness!
Now bards, let mirth ascend, I drink—My bride!
Make answer, echo!

[*There is a confused sound of shouting.*

THRYTHO *(aside)*. He comes! He comes! Inexorable! O heart,
What fearest thou, now in thy triumph hour,
For this new Man that leads along with him
New tidings, change of custom . . . ?

OFFA. Drink! Your brow
Is shadowed. Drink!

ELFRIDA *(aside)*. Now Christ I yield thee praise!

[*The melody once again ascends.*

Act V.

SCENE III.

The Bridal Chamber of OFFA *and* THRYTHO. *In the background a curtained archway. On the threshold* THREE WOMEN *spin and sing.*

The thread is spun, the task is done—
The shroud that shall thy limbs enfold.
The fire yet burns within thy brains,
The tide of blood yet floods thy veins,
That shall, ere dawn, be cold.

Kingly pride scorns the bride,
Steeps in blood the marriage sheets,
Builds for one a bed in hell,
Bids her lord a long farewell—
Fast the shuttle fleets.

[*They pause in their singing as a sound of revelry approaches.*

1ST WOMAN. It is the end.

2ND WOMAN. It is the bride who cometh.

3RD WOMAN. It is the bride who shall not know the bride bed.

1ST WOMAN *(rising)*. Away!

[*All rise.* OFFA *and* THRYTHO *enter to the sound of barbaric music. As* THRYTHO *enters, each of* THE THREE *salutes her.*

1ST WOMAN. Hail, bride! [*She passes out.*

2ND WOMAN. Hail, Thrytho!
[*She passes out.*

3RD WOMAN. Hail! The end is come.
[*She passes out.*

OFFA *(at the door and speaking to those who have attended him).*

Give you goodnight, good friends, and jocund wassail,
And happy dreams of love.

THOSE WITHOUT. Hail, hail, King Offa!
All bliss be on thee and thy bride.

THRYTHO *(to the maidens who have attended her, and who have been laying aside her jewels and her outer robe).*

And ye,
Fair maidens, leave me now, and with farewell
Soft spoken, get ye to your beds and dream
All night of happy love.

MAIDENS. Lady, farewell.

[*All go out. Their voices die away, and* OFFA *comes forward to* THRYTHO.

OFFA. What word of welcome shall I give this hour,
This happy hour, long-looked for? By what name
Give greeting to my gladness?

THRYTHO. O, my lord,
Each hour that comes and goes is garmented
In divers fashion. In the robe we read
The glad or sorry name, and so give greeting
As best beseems . . . .
Behold, my lord, these wheels,
Three wheels, and woven garments by them laid,
And one of these must robe this hour of thine
For joy or sorrow.

OFFA. Strangely ring these words.

THRYTHO. More strange, my lord, are these.
Behold, and choose,
For one of these, O king, must be thy portion.
So, now take up, and look upon this first,
For here are threads which break not, and who wears
This robe shall ask none other, neither crave
Jewels or gold henceforth to deck him with.

OFFA. What shall this be? O God, it is a shroud—
Ill-omened token on our marriage eve!

THRYTHO. Fear not, my lord, this shroud is not for thee,
'Twas woven for thy mortal enemy!
And here my marriage robe—not yet complete—
The last thread needs . . . .

OFFA. What fantasy is this?

THRYTHO. Let me sit down before this loom, O King,
And for our marriage bed make all things meet.
This will not yet be finished till thy hand
Hath rightly worked the message of this robe.

OFFA. A thing of horror! Fling it forth the room!

THRYTHO. My lord, I wove it for thy enemy.

OFFA. What enemy is this?

THRYTHO. The Anglian Scop.

OFFA. No enemy!

THRYTHO. O King, hast thou forgotten?

OFFA. A song! A song! To praise my daughter's beauty!
Surely 'tis past.

THRYTHO. Yea, whom he sang, he loved,
And whom he praised, defamed in praising her.

OFFA. I'll not believe it! Dost thou mark my word?
'Tis false, 'tis false—thy witness for this tale.

THRYTHO. The witness of mine eyes, and of thine own,
Wilt thou but seek these guilty lovers out;
Together thou shalt find them if thou go—
If not, against me, Offa, turn the steel.

OFFA. Strange talk is this for newly-wedded love!

THRYTHO. Strange hesitation to avenge thy shame!

OFFA. Strange were it should I doubt my daughter's faith!

THRYTHO. Doubtest thou thy Queen? Go, prove that I have said.

OFFA. Why wouldst thou have me hence? How should I go,
Leaving my bride? To-morrow may suffice:
Come, put this by.

THRYTHO. My wheel lags heavily
While thy tongue runs; this symbol of our bliss
I see will ne'er be woven.

OFFA. Speak plainer, thou,
What would'st thou have me do?

THRYTHO. Take down thy sword.
Were not her shame sufficient argument
There's yet another reason for his blood.

OFFA. I pray thee, Thrytho, tempt me not to sin.

THRYTHO. O my brave Lord! 'Tis spoken like a King!
Lend thou attentive ear. If thou canst list
And still delay, I'll slay thee in thy sleep
Rather than clasp a coward to my heart!

[*Sings and weaves.*

In a singer's robe the King
Sought to meet his far-off bride,
Laid aside his pomp and pride,
Learned the lay of Scops to sing—
Honour be to Wierd!

Far behind him noble lands,
Princely crown and royal state!
Tempts he thus the cruel fate?
He is in the foeman's hands—
Honour be to Wierd!

What are maiden's tears and sighs?
They have mingled clasp and kiss,
Now farewell her shameful bliss,
At a stranger's feet he lies,
Feels the avenging blade and dies,
Honour be to Wierd!

OFFA. What is the meaning of this song, O Thrytho?

THRYTHO. Even the same that the wheel hums in spinning.

OFFA. How shall I work thy will?

THRYTHO. Hear me, O King.
Lo, from the great hall to this chamber runs
A corridor; at this end and at that
A curtained archway—well may I remember it!
And oftentimes to one who comes or goes
Adown that corridor, with memory
Of kisses on his lips, comes the swift death,
And slays him, smiling, in a dream of love;
So dies he happy. Hearken yet, O Offa.
At this end of the corridor thy love,
At that thy shame. Surely she waits even now
To hear his coming! and I also wait—
I also, Offa, for thy coming back.
And now behold, O King, that door is open
And all the way lies plain for thy forth-going.

[*She draws aside the curtain and places a dagger in his hand.*

OFFA. What is this might thou layest on my soul?
What strong enchantment hast thou wrought on me
To drive me to the doing of this deed?

THRYTHO. Lovest thou me? Hope never thou to clasp
Thy bride till thou hast steeped this blade in blood
And won thyself a Kingdom with that blow.

OFFA. Give me my sword.

THRYTHO. This dagger will suffice thee.

OFFA. I thought this night was Love's; lo! it is Death's.
I thought to have crushed those red lips white with kisses,
And lo! those lips have driven me forth to this,
This horror, that I may not shape in words.

THRYTHO. Go hence, my lips and I wait thy return,
And thou shalt find me richer than thy thought,
More lovely than thy dream.

OFFA. I go from thee
To do what deed?

THRYTHO. The deed thou doest is mine.
Go, think on thy reward, and plunge thy blade
Deep, as thou would'st hereafter taste thy bliss
Even in the heart.

OFFA. I go!

[*He goes out, still turning to gaze upon her face.*

THRYTHO. Ho! Victory!
Victory, O ye Mighty Ones! Behold
Anglia is Mercia's, Mercia is mine,
I am all yours, ye Changeless Ones! More swift
Revolve your mystic cycles! Bring again
The reign and reverence of the King of heaven,
Who guides your course, O stars, who strews the abyss
With light and darkness, thunder, and the rays
Of sun and moon and countless sparkling orbs.
Hear me, All-Father! Hear me, Woden, Frey,
I have no life, no being save in you,
In you and for you, like those lights which keep
Their Heaven-directed way thro' the wide night!
Out, false pretence!

[*She rends the unfinished robe on the loom.*

The Gods, the Gods have gathered
Into their hands my brittle life-thread up!
Hail Thrytho, bride, thrice hail! The end is come!

Act V.

SCENE IV.

A Room in Offa's Palace.

At the back a curtained archway giving entrance to Offa's *Bed-chamber. Archways also curtained on the right and on the left. It is night.* Elfrida *enters, carrying a torch which she sets in a bracket between the central door and the door to the left.* Hrosfrith *follows her, also bearing a light which she sets between the central door and the door to the right.*

Elfrida. Tell me, have they yet found him?

Hrosfrith. All this day
Have they been seeking for the noble Earl,
Nor yet hath any found him.

Elfrida. It may be
He is escaped. Hearken, what is that singing?

Hrosfrith. O lady, there is revelry this night
To grace King Offa's wedlock, and they drink
The Earls, the common folk, the fighting men
There in the Mead Hall, hearkening what the harp
Tells of her beauty and his prowess.

Elfrida. Hearken!
Again their laughter mounts. And thou, O Ælfric,

Art food for worms, and thy most reverend locks
Are laid in mould! And thou, my uncle
Hrothgar . . . .
O thou liest dead, this blot upon thine honour
To black thy name for ever! Yet, again,
Tell me, O Hrosfrith, all that bitter story;
It may be that in conning it anew,
New light may show.

HROSFRITH. Thus spake the Lady Thrytho:
('Twas yester eve when Offa came again
With victory home) . . . .

ELFRIDA. Alas, but yester eve!

HROSFRITH. *Seeing there was none other way to choose*
Save one of two, that either I must yield
And give his passion way, or he must die;
Cunningly then did I devise a trap
To keep my honour, promising his love
All that his love could ask. But when he left me
He went into the dark, and for my kiss
He had the dagger 'twixt his shoulder blades.

ELFRIDA. Alas, unhappy Hrothgar!

HROSFRITH. Then the man
Who was suborned unto this fatal deed
(Lo, even thus and thus he told his part)
Drew forth the body to the burying place,

And in that moment, lo! the tread of warriors,
The song of Offa's triumph, close at hand.
A terror seized him lest they, passing there,
Should slay him in their anger, and he fled,
Leaving the dead. But when he came again
The dead was gone.

ELFRIDA. The eagle and the wolf
Doubtless in some dark den divide those bones,
That flesh that one time called my Mother *Sister.*
Go, Hrosfrith, leave me, for the hour grows late
And I am full of heavy thoughts to-night.

HROSFRITH. Lady, farewell, and comfort wait on thee,
And quiet dreams.

ELFRIDA. Farewell! Nay, ere thou goest,
One moment, Hrosfrith, let me look on thee,
As one might look her last, for thou hast loved me,
Hast served me well.

HROSFRITH. And look, O Elfrida,
To serve thee still.

ELFRIDA. Nay, who may tell what chance
Fate hath in store for any one of us
That we should boast us, *what I did before*
I look still to perform?
If thou shouldest see me
No more henceforth . . . .

HROSFRITH. Alas, what mean you, lady?

ELFRIDA. Remember that I loved thee. Take this jewel,
And when thou lookest upon it, think of me.
And so no questioning, but farewell. It may be
That these ill dreams that shake my rest shall pass
And all be well; but now, farewell, and leave me.

HROSFRITH. Lady, I go, and sadder than I came,
For now I see that even when we deem
Our sorrow at the darkest, yet there comes
A deeper dark than all that went before.

[*Exit* HROSFRITH.

ELFRIDA. To-night he bade me watch and wait his coming.
What saith the rune stave? *Even when the King*
Lies drowned in wine and slumber look for me,
What time the Mead Hall sleeps, and in the East
Begin the first white tremblings of the dawn.
Come then, come royal Æthelbert, and take
Thy bride to thee; and make an ending, Love,
If love can make an end, of sorrow. Come,
And tell me that the King forgives the heart
I gave the Scop, and be my singer yet,
To charm me from my griefs. Ah me, I fear
That I have grown acquainted with such woes

We shall not soon be parted; for my heart
Is faint to-night. Would he were come and gone,
And all my fears had ending. Now all's silent,
The signal, Æthelbert.

[*She flings a torch through a loop hole in the outer wall. As she does so the curtain to the left is pushed aside and* HROTHGAR *staggers in, pallid and dying.*

HROTHGAR. Stay, Elfrida!

ELFRIDA. Who art thou? Oh, great God, what horror this?
What do I see? My uncle?

HROTHGAR. I am come
To warn thee, Elfrida, before I go,
Before the ending.

ELFRIDA. Oh, what mean these words?
Quick, let me call for aid.

HROTHGAR. Give me thy hand.
Thou shalt not stir one step, or all is lost.
Elfrida, hearken me! Yon' torch—what meant it?

ELFRIDA. My lord, it is the signal for my lover.

HROTHGAR. I tell thee 'tis the beacon for his death.

ELFRIDA. Alas, we are betrayed!

HROTHGAR. I have betrayed you,
I only. Heap your curses on my folly
And on her beauty.

ELFRIDA. O, these words are madness.
Alas, how wan art thou, how deathly cold!

HROTHGAR. I shall grow colder, sweet. Oh, oh,
I see him
Dead at my feet! His blood is on my feet,
His blood is rising to my throat, it chokes me!

[*He falls back dead. As he does so* ÆTHELBERT *enters by the opposite door.*

ÆTHELBERT. The hour is come.

ELFRIDA. Truly thou speakest, Egbert.
The latest hour, ere night shall swallow all.

ÆTHELBERT. What is this welcome? Woe! this dead! what means it?

ELFRIDA. My lord, fly, save thyself, we are betrayed.
Go, ere the dawning wake the warriors;
Even now, who knows, even now perchance her eyes
Are on us and the death we wot not of
Waits to devour. I pray thee, Æthelbert,

Stay not to question me, but hence. Perchance
In days to come, love shall return to thee
With blessing sweet, a happier love than mine!

ÆTHELBERT. Thy words are wild. If there be
danger here . . . .
Hearken! All's quiet, even as this dead.
No cause for fear, they slumber late to-night,
And long after the dawn the new-wed King,
Locked in his bride's embrace will linger still,
And still delay his rising. Sweet, away,
And leave this bloody horror, and forget—
Save as a tale of ancient woe long past—
This bygone wretchedness, and come, nor tarry
To gaze upon the dead.

[OFFA *enters behind them.*

OFFA. Too true, too true!
Then in thy blood, the treachery of thy blood,
False friend, be blotted . . . .

ELFRIDA. Fly! We are betrayed!
Egbert, my father! Egbert, save thyself!

OFFA *(stabbing him).* Thus, thus, and thus.

[ÆTHELBERT *falls.*

ELFRIDA. Alas, what hast thou done?
Thou hast slain my lord. O, royal Æthelbert!
O Christ, my fear, my fear! Speak, Æthelbert,
How fare you, sweet?

ÆTHELBERT. Already past your prayers.
Come closer yet. One kiss, sweet Elfrida.
I cannot see thee. [*He dies.*

ELFRIDA. O, it is the end!
Most cruel father, thou hast slain my lord!

OFFA. What! in my sight? Harlot! away from him.

ELFRIDA *(wildly)*. Aye, kill me now. You could not do a deed
More full of charity. I will not rise,
Now leave my barren kissing of these lips,
These poor, cold lips, till I have stirred your hate
To speed my death. I shall not, sure, live long.
O long enough to greet thee, Æthelbert,
When thou returnest hither like a King—
Arise my lord, to horse, to horse, away!
Come Æthelbert, my love, stay not till dawn,
But save thee, save thee, save thee, my good lord.

[EGFRITH *and Attendants enter.*

EGFRITH. What cry was that? O horror seal my eyes!
O noble Æthelbert! What hast thou done?

OFFA. I have slain my foe—and justly have I slain him.

This Scop was treacherous, foul—O past your thought.
I killed him, and I think I crazed her wits
With the same blow that struck him . . . .

EGFRITH. From behind!
A villain blow! Know you who was this same?
The royal Æthelbert of Anglia!

[*Enter* THRYTHO, *Warriors, etc.*

OFFA. How might I know? She called him Egbert, still:
Egbert, fly, save thee, Egbert, see he comes!
How should I know he was her lawful lord?

ELFRIDA. Ay, Egbert, Egbert, rouse thee, wake, my lord.

EGFRITH. Alas! sweet Elfrida, he will not wake!
Dear Sister! Heaven! She knows me not!

ELFRIDA. Our love is innocent, not stained with blood.
I fear her, fear her! Ælfric she has slain,
And Hrothgar's fled, and thou wilt never speak,
Nor cheer my sorrow. O unkind! unkind!

EGFRITH. Who is that woman?

WARRIOR. 'Tis the Queen, my lord,

EGFRITH. My Father's Queen?

WARRIOR. Ay, wedded but this night.

EGFRITH. When shall I learn the utmost of my woe!
Wedded, new wedded, Offa! and to her.

OFFA. My queenly bride asks not your sharp disdain—
Your homage rather.

EGFRITH. Bear my sister hence.
She fears that woman, babbles words most strange
Of dreadful meaning. [ELFRIDA *is borne out.*
O to me she seems
A loathly incarnation of all vice;
More ugly than the ugliest of sins,
Lust, cruelty . . . . yet all together mixed
Might piece out such a form.

THRYTHO. This was my dread—
My power is at an end, and I must hence.
Whence comes this youth to blight my empire here
E'en at its crescent? Offa, coward, fool,
Terrified by his deed, is stricken dumb.
Save thyself, Thrytho, from the avenger's hand!

EGFRITH. Offa! I'll probe this mischief to the root.
How came my uncle dead?

OFFA. False to his trust,
He would have robbed me where I most confided—
Even in the sacred honour of my Queen.

EGFRITH. Where is the noble Ælfric?

WARRIOR. Slain, my lord.
My hand cut short his life, and for the deed
I do repent me. 'Twas the Queen's command.

EGFRITH. Where is Earl Harold?

WARRIOR. Fallen in the fray
In which the good Earl Ælfric lost his life.

EGFRITH. How came this fray?

OFFA. Most foul rebellion,
Proud questioning of our authority,
Gross insult to our Queen.

EGFRITH. The Queen! The Queen!
Still the refrain of this most woeful tale!
Where is the Queen? I'd look on her more nigh.

OFFA. Presumptuous rebel! Seize on this proud boy.

EGFRITH. Seize on the Queen! Offa, tho' thou art King,
Ay, King and Father, thou shalt not go hence
Till I have heard from thee and from thy Queen
Some ground for these excesses of your power—
Thy power and hers. Was *this* also her deed?

OFFA. Her deed and mine. I dare avow the same.
A noble deed; your childish, coward heart,
Egfrith, had failed in striking this one blow
That brings all Mercia within Anglia's grasp.

EGFRITH. O infamous avowal! Thou poor clay
That hearest not this insult of thy foe,
I will avenge—or never wear a crown—
Thy cruel end, thy blood, Elfrida's tears,
And all the heap of your calamity!
O Offa! for this deed, thy name shall be
To days unborn a hissing, linked with hers
In hate and scorn, beyond the power of thought.
A woman's deed. O God! O God! And thou,
My Father! Woe! O woe unutterable!

OFFA. I will to Rome and shrive my soul of sin.

THRYTHO. O Offa, art thou King, or fool, or babe,
Who tremblest at the threatenings of a boy?
O be thyself, be King, and cast aside
That coward conscience, traitor to thy peace.

OFFA. Go! Get thee gone!

THRYTHO. Thy Queen?

OFFA. My Queen? My Devil!
Plague, Sorceress, Fiend! . . . .
Why camest thou then to tempt me to perdition?
Look all upon this woman, and this slain!
Is she not fair? And yet there's blood upon her.
'Twas not my hand, I swear it!

THRYTHO. 'Tis the end!

EGFRITH. Close all upon her; let her not escape.

THRYTHO. Escape? There is a way, follow who dare!

EGFRITH. Juggle not thus, thy power is at an end.

THRYTHO. O King and Husband, royal, royal Mercia!
No kiss to grace our parting; not one tear?
If thou would'st hold me now—but nay, farewell!
My part is played, and *well*—witness, O Father!
The Gods have called me, and I must away!

[*Stabs herself. Thunder is heard.*

OFFA. O woe! What hast thou done! O bitter woe!

EGFRITH. The Heavens themselves exclaim! Yet 'twas well done.

[*Thunder again rolls heavily.*

THRYTHO. O Mead Hall of Valhalla! Thor!
Thor! Thor!
I hear! I come! I come with victory! Thor!
[*She falls.*

The scene grows dark. Clouds roll over it. The figures of EGFRITH *and his armed followers gleam through the cloud ever more faintly. The cloud gathers, and in the cloud are seen, shadowy and vast,* THREE, *weaving. Below their feet lies* THRYTHO, *dead, with upturned face, the dagger in her hand. They chant together.*

Strife of the Princes,
Calling to battle,
Change of watchwords,
Falling of Empire:
The life of man upon mould we are weaving,
The thread of the Gods is between our fingers.

THE PAST. My task is ended. Lo! I have woven here
A grave-robe and a shrouding; for the Past
Is dead, and all its Gods are grown as ghosts,
And all its gladness and its goodliness
Are but as spectres, that shall haunt the years
To be with visions. And, as of the dead
Men speak with kindly word, so shall they long

With all their soul's desire for what is gone,
And weep for it, and call the Present foul,
And seek again my ways, and find them not.
And lo! herein have I my victory!

THE PRESENT *(who weaves blindfold).*
Behold, my work is evermore to make,
Nor may I tell what shall be. I have woven,
Meseems, a marriage garment. Who may speak
The issue of this wedlock and its ending?
Future and Past join hands in one. I see not!
I hear not! Would that light and song were come!
My power is for a moment and nor memory,
Nor longing, nor regret, nor looking forward
Clings to my empty name; for I am *now*,
But for a moment: yet that moment endless!
And lo! herein have I my victory!

THE FUTURE. Sable thy deathly robe! Blood-red, O sister,
Thy marriage garb!
With golden threads I weave,
With threads of green, coloured of spring to be
I weave; with pattern of the flowering earth
I weave; with picture of the flowing sea
I weave; with love-light in the eyes of men
I weave! My wheel is singing, O my sisters!
'Tis not the song of birds, nor children's laughter,

Nor music of the wind on flowers of summer . . . .
O hear! More sweet and strong, the heart of Man
Hails life and sings, new freed from ancient bondage!
I see, I see the dawning put to flight
And quite extinguish all the stars of night!
I hear! I hear . . . .

THE PRESENT. What hearest thou, O sister?

THE FUTURE. The voice that shall redeem the world to joy.

THE PRESENT. The voice?

THE FUTURE. Of HIM who comes.

THE PAST. He came, He passed!
He set his feet in blood from age to age.

THE FUTURE. He comes again!

THE PRESENT. O let me look upon Him!

THE FUTURE. He comes again!

THE PRESENT. How long?

THE FUTURE. His Coming fails not!

[*They break into singing.*

Strife of the Princes,
Calling to battle,
Falling of ensigns,
Change of watchwords.
The life of man upon mould we are weaving,
The thread of the Gods is between our fingers.

Clouds roll over the scene. The sound of singing dies. THRYTHO *lies dead with upturned face, as one who, sleeping, hearkens.*

Death and Dream Songs

Death and Dream Songs.

I.

Could you, but for one brief hour, break your sleep,
And come to sit beside me here to-night,
I'd waste no moment of your time to weep,
But tell you all. You, from your far-off land,
Might bring no tidings I should understand,
Who wait here, blind, for light;

But, had you yet remembrance, that clings
To memories of home, and earthly things,
You, who have passed beyond them, might make plain
The ultimate goal of strife,
The frustrate yearnings and unfruitful pain:
Those splendours veiled that threaten and allure,
The eternal, unread riddle of my life.

Ah me, I do but dream! You sleep secure.
You do not hear the wind and rain complain,
As I, who sit to catch your voice in vain,
Hear, and a burden in their ceaseless moan,
One plaintive undersong and sad refrain
That sings its lonely note into my heart alone.

II.

Could I in dreams but feel you near,
And reach glad lips to yours, and hear,
Ah, but in dreams, again your voice,
How would my waiting heart rejoice,
And count the hours, till twilight grey
Should end the tedious, empty day!

My dreams are dark, my dreams are dumb!
I see not, hear not, and you come
By night nor day. I sleep, I wake:
Day follows day, and for your sake
Is empty grown of all save pain.
No longer doth my heart complain,
But, wedded to dull misery,
Forgets almost the How and Why
It grew to such a joyless mood.
Thus day by day goes vacant by,
And night, that does not know your face,
Is but a darker interlude
Twixt days that lack your dear embrace.

III.

(A Child Dead).

Lullaby, my pretty one,
Lullaby, my little son!
Eyes that none have looked into
Only mine, close up your blue.
Hushaby your sweetest moan,
My heart's own.

Dearest Love, so sound asleep,
Do you hear your Baby weep?
Hush, my dear, your father hears,
You will wake him with your tears.
Lullaby, they must sleep sound
In the ground.

Let me still in dreams enfold you,
Let my fancy clasp and hold you.
Do not fear me, tho' all mock me
When I sit to soothe and rock ye.
I would hush you tenderly,
Lullaby!

Lullaby, my pretty dear,
Lullaby, and have no fear.
See, my little babe at rest!
Sleep, and wake not. Sleep is best.
Lullaby, my dearest boy,
Heart's own joy.

IV.

Bring me hither heart's-ease pansies,
  Now the day's nearly done,
Marigolds and yellow tansies,
  Bright and round like the sun.
Must I lie here alone,
  All alone in the dark?
  Hark, my love, hark
To my moan.

You will never more come nigh me,
  You will weep and forget;
You will laugh and belie me
  While your bright eyes are wet.
You will say, he is dead;
  He lies still, you will say,
With a stone at his head,
  Wellaway!

V.

Dead, dead, dead,
In the mould, in the mould!
Will you kiss my lips instead?
For your well-beloved is cold
In the mould.

Cold, cold, cold,
In the ground, in the ground!
Had you kissed me, who had told?
For they sleep so still, so sound
In the ground.

VI.

My true Love holds me with both hands
And sets a kiss upon my brow.
Tho' I should wander thro' strange lands,
Alone I should not wander now.

Tho' I should lie all night and weep
To think my Love might come no more,
At dawn my eyelids should know sleep
And Love should come thro' bolted door.

Tho' death should set us far apart,
My Love, where'er my Love might be
Should dwell beside me, heart to heart,
Tho' God put Hell twixt Love and me.

O Life, not Death, O Love, not Hate,
Alas, what evil did we do,
That ye should bring my Love too late,
And set strange kisses twixt us two?

VII.

Nor low complaint nor sighs,
Wan lips, nor tear-drenched eyes
Chooseth my Lady Sorrow
To be her token.

In raiment bright and fair
She goeth here and there;
That all who see her, say,
Here cometh Joy our way.

For her device she finds
A heart a rose wreath binds.
None sees the thorn, none knoweth
The heart is broken.

VIII.

Rest be on one and all to-night,
Whose heavy eyelids dread the light;
And darkness, and no dreams of bliss,
To mock the morrow's bitterness.

Nor yet let Memory bear her part,
To torture and distract the Heart.
Come, dusk Oblivion, dally here,
And hence, delusive Hope and Fear.

Upon no roses lay thine head,
To lure Delight, long banishéd,
To watch thy slumber, lest thou say,
Waking, alas, another day!

And seek not, slumbering, to recall
In dreams what coffin lid and pall
Long since have hidden, lest thou moan,
Waking, that thou art still alone.

Nor seek, to bring thee to thy rest,
Sweet melodies, for Silence best
Approaches Slumber, known of her,
Mute, undenied ambassador.

No sound of lute or harp they hear
Who have the mould in either ear;
I think thou scarce shalt sleep so sound
As these who slumber underground.

Dark, noiseless, let the chamber be,
Where Sleep shall smooth thy bed for thee;
And yet if harsh thy counterpane,
Thou shalt not murmur nor complain.

It needs not silk nor Indian dyes
To conjure from the quiet skies
Oblivion. This they know whom God
Hath put to sleep beneath the sod.

The stars, the winds above them sweep—
They know not. At the shrine of Sleep
They keep their watch, nor hear, nor see.
Be these remembered of thee.

Put Joy and Sorrow from thy breast,
And haste thee, haste, to meet thy rest;
Nor pray to see the light again,
For dawn brings hope, and hope is vain,
And frustrate yearning is but pain.
Sleep sound, and ere thou sink to rest,
Think, Who sleeps longest, sleeps the best.

IX.

I SLEPT, I dreamed, I woke with pain.
The dreadful dawn at the cheerless pane
Glared ghastly on mine eyes again.

The dead who hear the loud cock-crow
Are hence and away ere morning glow,
But I am chained, I cannot go.

A spirit in a flame of light
Consumes my heart for his delight,
I stretch my hands and cry for night.

Day, what have I to do with thee?
The darkness best companions me,
Go hence, go hence and let me be!

X.

Now go I back to my land forsaken,
  Live again in my land of Dreams,
Drinking the Fountain of Things Forgotten,
  Eating the fruit of the Thing that Seems.

And under the tree that hides the Sun,
  The Morning Star, and the Evening Star,
I build for my heart a dwelling place,
  A refuge, a home from the Things that Are.

Four walls hath my house where I dwell alone:
  Forgetting-of-Life and Hoping-no-more;
And Remembrance-of-Death, and the fourth is
      Sleep,
  And Silence the bolt of my door.

Windows are set in my house also,
  To the East, and one to the West,
Where no sun rises and no star sets;
  So hath my heart her rest.

Two windows yet in the walls thereof,
  To the North, and one to the South,
Where the river runs of Might-have-been
  To ease my soul of drouth.

Now I go back to my land forsaken,
  Now to my land that is mine alone,
Where lone seas beat on the hills gold with bracken,
  And one sad bird at dusk makes moan.

Now I go back to my heart's own country,
  Out of my weeping, out of my pain,
From the land where truth is a scourge and grief,
  To the land where truth is vain.

Where the true is false, and the false is true,
  And that which might not be
Is that alone of all that is,
  There in my own country.

Let us go thither, my heart and I,
  We have wept and sorrowed sore!
From the light that is dark of the lower sky,
  Hence! They shall see us no more.

XI.

Him whom in dreams, which are my life,
I call my Love, I late saw dead,
As one who slumbers after strife;
His eyes up-closed whence light had fled,

His hands laid crosswise on his breast,
His head a little turned my way,
His lips unsmiling, and close pressed
As who knows much, yet naught will say.

No sound of tears was there, nor moan,
Nor was there dirge nor requiem sung,
But, by the dead I stood alone,
And greeted him with faltering tongue:—

Closed eyes, that cannot see my pain,
Cold hands, that mine may clasp and keep,
Dumb lips, that chide not, nor complain,
Deaf ears, that do not hear me weep!

While we yet lived our lips were strange;
I yearned, but might not know thy kiss.
Death, that is master of all change,
Bringeth at last this bitter bliss,

To lay my head upon thy hands,
To kiss thee to my grief's content,
To deem thy dead heart understands
And thy mute stillness yields assent.

XII.

THERE is no poet hath made rhymes
To match the changing of the chimes;
There is none hath preached so well
As the tolling church-yard bell.
Of life and time this uttereth,
That of parting and of death.
Life and time how swift they flee,
Death, how soon thou summonest me!
When the chimes their change have played
Twice or thrice, our bones are laid,
Glad for rest, beneath the sod.
None knows what comes then save God.
The bell tolls low and prayers are said,
Then all men pass and leave the dead
Quiet in the grassy place,
With light of dreams upon his face.

XIII.

(I.)

Hast thou then power, thou, shadow of a dream,
That fears the breaking of the dawn, and flies
Before the unclosure of awakened eyes,
And lives but darkling 'midst the things that seem;
Hast thou then power to print upon my heart
The lie that thou art true? My heart was proud
Before thy coming, when I knew the truth
And claimed her, under dawn-flushed skies of youth,
Calling her mine, deeming there was no cloud
Betwixt her and mine eyes. Thou art not she!
Altho' I hold thee fair and kneel to thee,
And, wotting well, how thou dost pour for me
A poisoned pledge, fall at thy feet and pray
To drink the precious draught. O let me drink!
And mock me from my reason! To gainsay
My asking were to show thee to my heart
False, cruel, hateful—woe!—the thing thou art!
Give me thy cup and I will swear and think
That thou art pitiful and kind to me,
Fair as a flower, that, on a river's brink
Unfolds at dawning, drenched with sunwarm dew.

(II.)

It may be that my lips blasphemed indeed,
And thou art true and good as thou art grown,
My sole desire, a blossom and no weed.
Alas, there is no God whom time hath known
Can change the names of things. A miracle,
Is this beyond omnipotence. Tho' ill
Were good miscalled, the name must cleave to it still!
I may not call thee truth! Must thou be still
A dream and false, O thou my only bliss?
Art thou my part, and must my heart forego
All easeful hours and honour for thy kiss?
Must quiet sleep, unvexed by haunting fears,
Change to a fever that consumes the tears
That for remembrance of things past would flow
To ease my heart? Alas, if this must be,
Set thy lips close, and with thine amorous breath
Warm my chill blood. My heart beats but for thee!
This is the truth. Speak now sweet lies to me,
I'll hearken and believe, and pray for death.

(III.)

Yet would thou hadst not come into my life,
Most beautiful, to set thy loveliness
Between and my world! for that was fair
Ere thou didst come, and I knew happiness.
Now art thou set between me and the stars,
And in the change of music thou art there,
And in all things that once had power to bless
And are become a curse. Thou hast set bars
Upon my spirit, and on all save tears,
Blind tears, that hold no solace for my pain,
Since through their mist thy beauty shows the less,
And blurred and dim thy loveliness appears.

(IV.)

Till thou didst come I held the high gods just,
Myself divine, the heart of the human true;
But when I had looked long into thine eyes,
And dreamed awhile, and then awaked from lies,
That mocked my trust;
Waking, I heard the world, and hearts of men
Crumble and fall to nothingness, and knew
The whole world for a dream, and myself, dust.

XIV.

I HAD a Sorrow none might know,
I dwelt alone beside the sea.
My Grief was as a child to me,
With mine own life I fed my woe.

My Grief it grew both great and strong,
It walked beside me hand in hand,
It led me to a lonely land
And sang a lonely slumber song.

My Grief has grown my lover now,
And gazes long into my face,
And clasps me with a chill embrace,
Setting strange kisses on my brow.

My Grief, when all my beauty pales,
Will slay me here beside the sea,
Where none shall hear, and none shall see,
Nor can my silent lips tell tales.

Those eyes will brighten from mine own,
That tongue will learn to mimic mine,
I shall not murmur nor repine,
I shall be still and make us moan.

And he shall wander great and strong,
  Loud carolling. There is one I know
  Whose cruel kindness bred my woe.
When this one hearkens to the song,

I know what mocking lips will say
  Half scornful, smiling half in pain,
  These tears then, were but April rain,
Lo! laughter, song, and jocund day.

XV.

THERE is a tree that stands alone
And makes a musical low moan:
A pine tree on a southern shore,
And alien in its true heart's core.
The Northern blast it doth not know,
Hath felt no weight of Northern snow,
The cystus and arbutus grow
About it; in the vale below
The orange with its fruity gold,
And twisted olives, grey and old.

But, when the sun at noontide glows,
And, flashing light, the streamlet flows,
When all the wood is hushed, nor knows
One breath of wind from far-off snows;
A mystic whisper comes and goes,
And in a low, sad monotone,
The lonely stranger maketh moan,
And dreams of wintry lands unknown.
It dreams, it sleeps: 'Tis night, and lo
It feels the weight of wintry snow,
The whirlwinds thro' its branches blow,
A cradle song that sinks and soars.

The stars are hid, and darkness lowers
And blackens on a moorland lone
And desolate. A token known
Far round midst heath and mossy stone,
The tree outspreads its sheltering boughs
Deep laden o'er one humble house,
And stands to guide the feet that roam
Thro' storm and wildering snowdrift, home.

XVI.

(Allegro ma non troppo).
SCHUMANN.

ONCE had I leave to look into a wondrous garden;
Great blossoms gazed there on me, questioning,
And nodding their bright heads; and butterflies,
Great golden butterflies were fluttering there
From bed to bed. Over the velvet turf
The dew lay shimmering like an Indian veil,
Enwrought with gold. Gay birds of Paradise
From branch to swaying branch above me swung;
Green-coated glanced the humming bird and gleamed
Among the leaves, and from the sky, behold,
The clouds of evening, rose-rimmed, beckoned me,
Signalled to me from blue infinity,

And then I heard a murmur,
A yearning, a passionate sigh!
Pale, 'midst the blossoming lilacs,
A woman's face gazed on me.
And the star of evening crowned her
In the gold silk-waves of her hair.
I heard a sigh!
A sigh of infinite yearning;
And alluring eyes held speech with me
Out of the lilac blossoms.

I saw no longer then
The great questioning blossoms.
No longer hovered before me
The yellow butterflies.
I followed the eyes so alluring,
I followed the yearning sigh.

Ripple of waters called me, drew me.
Reeds, wind-shaken, repeated that murmur.
Clearly whispered the wind its message,
Ah, yet clearer throbbed answer,
My own loud-beating Heart.

(Translated from the German of Bruno Lasker).

XVII.

Now all is still!
Night stoops her cooling wings to soothe the earth,
And hangs her trembling dew on every blade.
As in some dim arcade where shadows dream,
The fountain fills the air with murmuring sound
And whispers, foaming, in its marble brim,
Mixing its note with all the sounds of life,
So sings the rain now day and strife are done,
Its slumber song.

Now all is still, and Sorrow's self at rest.
Then Hope and Joyance, while that warder sleeps,
Possess them of my spirit. Free as air,
My soul soars hence, away to that far realm
Of loveliness and dreams where fancy sways.
The wearied body, every wish forgot,
Lies powerless, moveless, till the wan, grey dawn
Renew the endless batle yet again,
Torment and pain!

(Translated from the German of Bruno Lasker).

XVIII.

FAINT in the flaming weather
Meadow and moorland lie,
Faint through the sere brown heather,
The parched stream falters by.

Hushed is the lark. Sore groaning
The land in torment cries,
One soft wind knows its moaning,
Breathes low, and, pitying, sighs.

(Translated from the German of Bruno Lasker).

XIX.

(OMAR KHAYYAM).

AND why not die, then, if the brimming glass
Be Life's best gift? If Nature, ere she pass,
Stay but to quaff this bitter-sweet delight,
Then, with the last drops drained, reel into endless night?

Why linger till thy latest breath must moan,
Wine-cup and wine, and all thy joyance flown,
Turned into dust and ashes? or lament
The shattered cruse, the precious liquor spent?

Thou dost not drain the dregs, Omar! Thy look
Bent dreaming on the goblet's golden ground,
Reluctant, questioning, closest thou thy book.

(Translated from the German of Bruno Lasker).

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